

cigar aficionado

THE GOOD LIFE MAGAZINE FOR MEN

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ELLS FOR AUTISM

**RICKIE FOWLER'S
MILLION-DOLLAR
HOLE IN ONE**

**NEW TREND:
CONCIERGE
CINEMA**

**SEAN
COMBS**
UNSTOPPABLE FORCE

**MUST READ:
ONCE WE
WERE
BROTHERS**

**80
CIGARS
RATED**

**JOSÉ PADRÓN
CELEBRATES
90 YEARS**



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OF CRAFTSMANSHIP



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1 PART CLUB SODA



Combine BACARDÍ Maestro, lemon juice and sugar in cocktail shaker. Add ice and shake. Strain into tall glass with fresh ice. Top with soda and garnish with lemon wedge.

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2 CUCHARADAS DE AZÚCAR REFINADA
1 PARTE DE AGUA SODA



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1-2 TSP SUGAR
1 ORANGE ZEST

In an Old Fashioned glass, pour in the sugar, water and Angostura® Bitters. Then combine everything with a bar spoon (or muddler) and add half the BACARDÍ 8 Años. Next, drop two or three large ice cubes into the glass and stir repeatedly. Pour in the second half of the rum and two or three more ice cubes and continue to stir. Now cut a piece of orange peel and squeeze it over the drink (to release the zest) before dropping it into the drink.

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1-2 CUCHARADAS DE AZÚCAR
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Rocky  *Patel*

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Romeo by Romeo y Julieta,
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complimented by
double fermented
2008 *vintage tobaccos*.

Anejo is a rich and robust cigar
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and coffee for a memorable smoke

Romeo Anejo by Romeo y Julieta.
A passion though the years.

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may/june 2016

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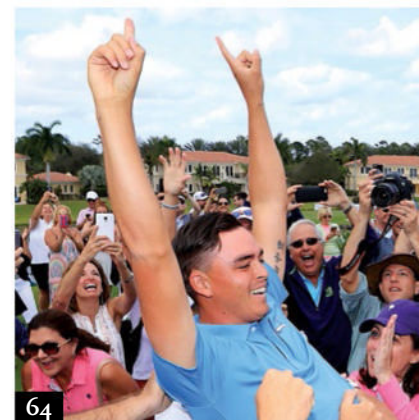
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34



64



46

ON THE COVER

From a hip-hop heritage P. Diddy grew an empire.
photograph by Jim Wright

Introducing



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culture **82** **MAGIC AT THE MOVIES**
New heights in luxury theaters, with reclining seats and classic cocktails, are changing the meaning of “dinner and a movie.”

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cigars

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Beautiful boats; bespoke bags; perfect penmanship; specialty seltzer; a reverberating razor; and a brewing breakthrough for coffee.



highlights

This was quite a strong tasting, particularly for the cigars of Cuba and Nicaragua. The three best scored 93 points: The Norteño Robusto Grande, the Romeo y Julieta Wide Churchill and the Montecristo Open Master. Norteño, which combines tobaccos from Nicaragua, Honduras and Mexico, comes from Willy Herrera and the team at Drew Estate. Crafted as a stronger version of the Herrera Esteli brand, the cigar has been on sale since 2014. The Romeo y Julieta Wide Churchill consistently scores well in CIGAR AFICIONADO and *Cigar Insider*. This is its fourth 93-point score. This is the highest-ever score for a Montecristo Open Master, a subset of the Montecristo brand named with a golf theme. Most of the other top scorers in this issue bear familiar names, such as Padrón, Cohiba and Illusione, but making its first appearance in CIGAR AFICIONADO is newcomer MBombay.



TOP CORONA GORDA
NORTEÑO ROBUSTO GRANDE

Willy Herrera and the team at Drew Estate created Norteño in 2014 as a stronger version of the lauded Herrera Esteli brand. This is its highest-ever rating.

NICARAGUA

93



TOP ROBUSTO
ROMEO Y JULIETA WIDE CHURCHILL

This Romeo, which goes by the Cuban factory name Montecristo, tied with the Montecristo Open Master for best robusto.

CUBA

93



TOP CHURCHILL
COHIBA ESPLENDIDO

This big, stately Cohiba has been on a winning streak. Out of its last eight reviews by our publications, it has only failed to make 90 points once.

CUBA

92



TOP CORONA
ILLUSIONE MK

Illusiones were born in Honduras but later moved to Nicaragua. They've always been superb, but we were particularly fond of this corona-sized mk, giving it our highest rating ever for the size.

NICARAGUA

92



TOP FIGURADO
MBOMBAY CLASSIC PERFECTO

A newcomer to the cigar world and the pages of CIGAR AFICIONADO, MBombay is made with a five-nation blend. This double-tapered perfecto scored quite well in its debut test.

COSTA RICA

92



TOP MISCELLANEOUS
PADRÓN SERIE 1926 NO. 35

Named for the number of minutes it takes company president Jorge Padrón to smoke, this short cigar provides immense flavor and balance.

NICARAGUA

92

My work is to capture time: a split second of a moment, when the animal expresses emotion and my picture interprets this precious time as art.

Masa Ushioda

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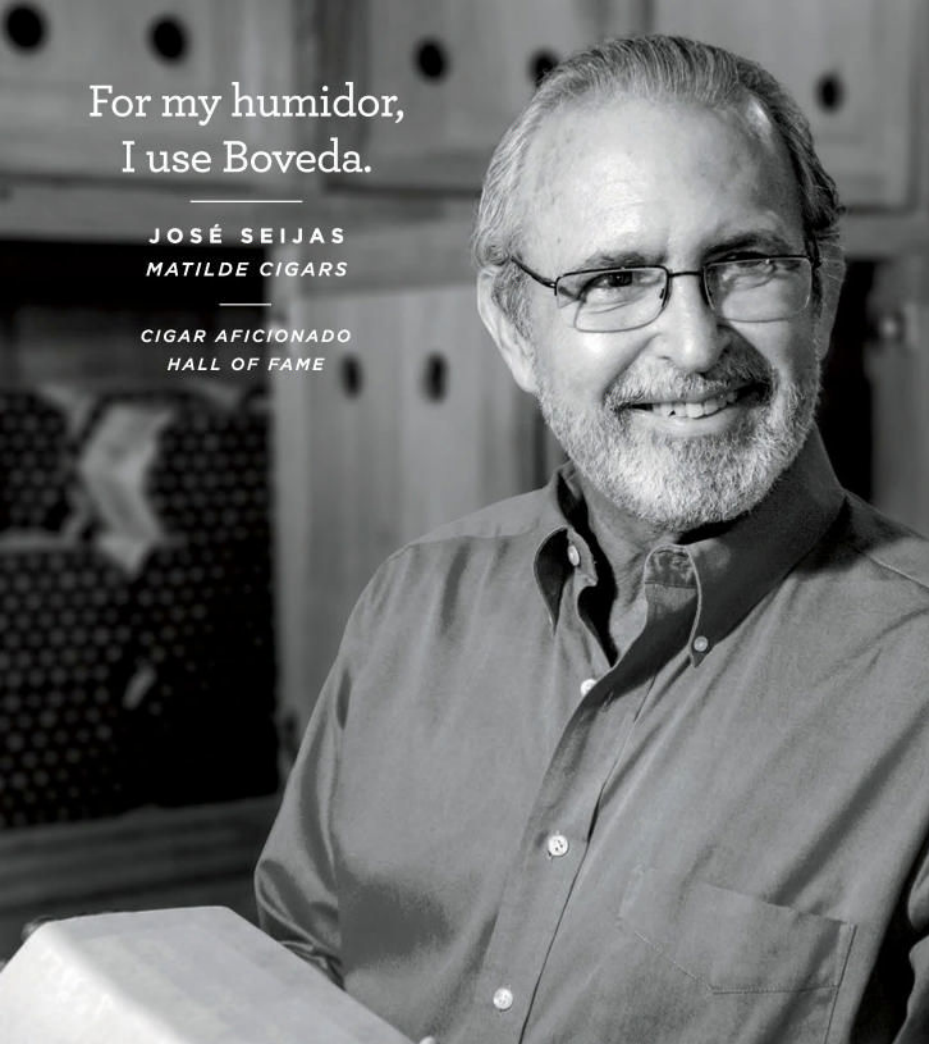
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MANUFACTURE DE HAUTE HORLOGERIE

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JOSÉ SEIJAS
MATILDE CIGARS

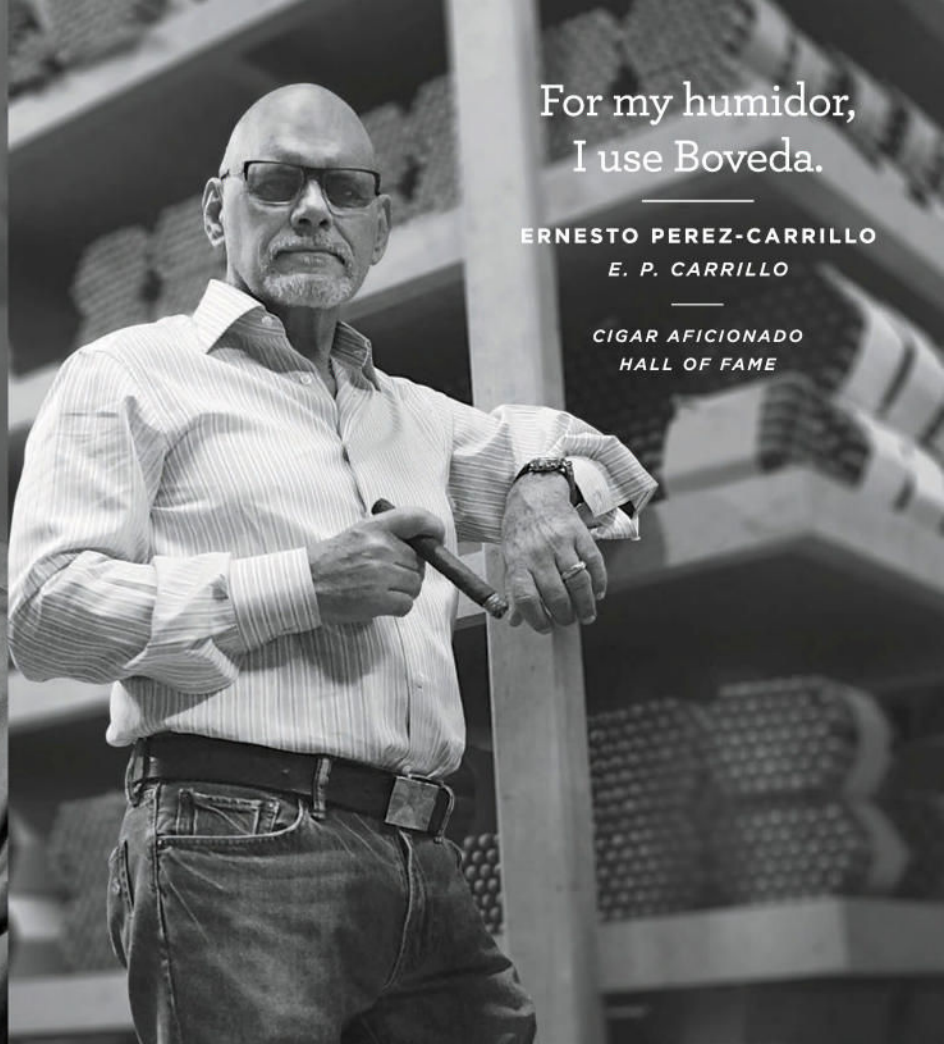
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HALL OF FAME



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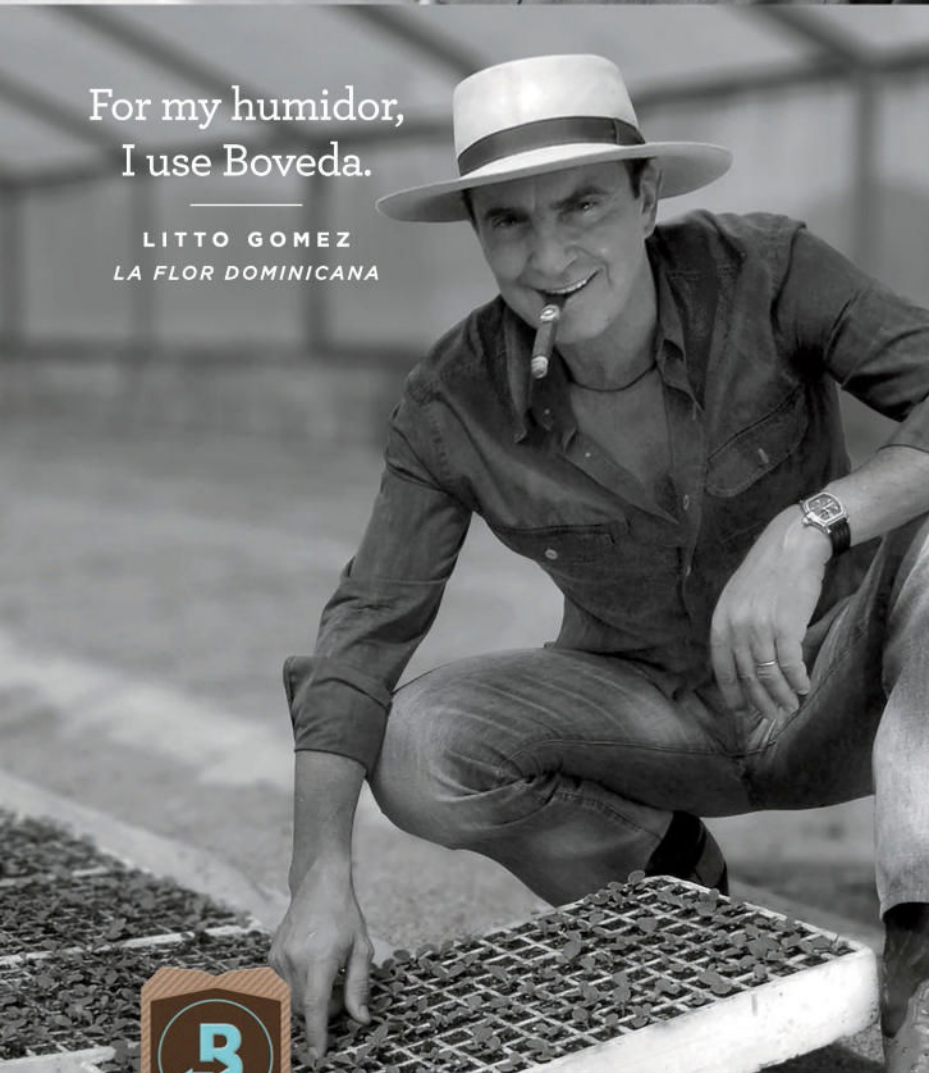
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CIGAR AFICIONADO
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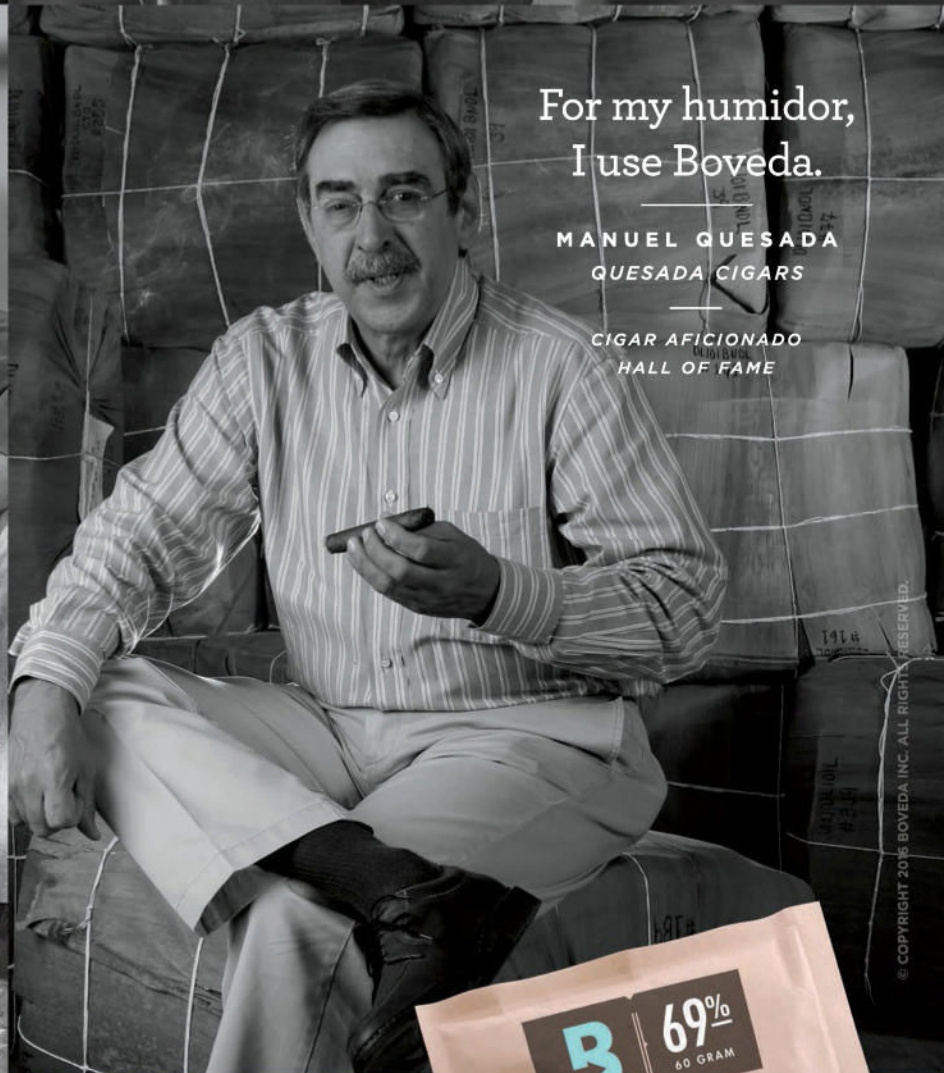
LITTO GOMEZ
LA FLOR DOMINICANA



For my humidor,
I use Boveda.

MANUEL QUESADA
QUESADA CIGARS

CIGAR AFICIONADO
HALL OF FAME



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A Visit To Cuba

You want to visit Cuba. We conducted a recent poll of our audience at cigaraficionado.com, and an incredible 95 percent of you said you were eager to pay a visit to the island, which has been off-limits to most Americans for more than 50 years.

Some of you reading this have already gone. Twenty-nine percent of you who answered our survey said you had been to Cuba at least once (some of you have gone several times) and most of you were quite pleased with the trip: 77 percent of you rated the visit very good or better, and 23.5 percent called it “the trip of a lifetime.”

One American who made the trip recently is U.S. President Barack Obama. He made history on March 20 as the first sitting American president in 88 years to set foot on Cuban soil. He spent time in Old Havana, watched a baseball game and met with some dissidents and Cuban leaders. But we wish more had been done.

Cuban President Raúl Castro wasn't shy about making demands during the visit, calling for the end of the embargo as well as the return of Guantanamo Bay. Former leader Fidel Castro expressed his disdain for the trip, writing in *Granma*: “We do not need the empire to give us anything.”

President Obama tread lightly. “I have come here to extend the hand of friendship to the Cuban people,” he said. But rather than demanding change, he merely alluded to Cuban freedom, stating: “I believe voters should be able to choose their governments in free and democratic elections.” This visit was long on style, but short on substance.

This is not the time to lose our way. We have come far since December 2014, when the two governments began to normalize relations. Making a trip to Cuba is getting easier for Americans. In March the U.S. eased some travel prohibitions to Cuba, allowing individual Americans to make people-to-people trips of their own design. Previously such visits were limited to groups run by licensed operators. And business ventures have begun. Starwood Corp. announced plans this spring to renovate and rebrand three Cuban hotels, and Carnival Cruise Lines is preparing to sail to Cuba this summer. But there's so much more to do.

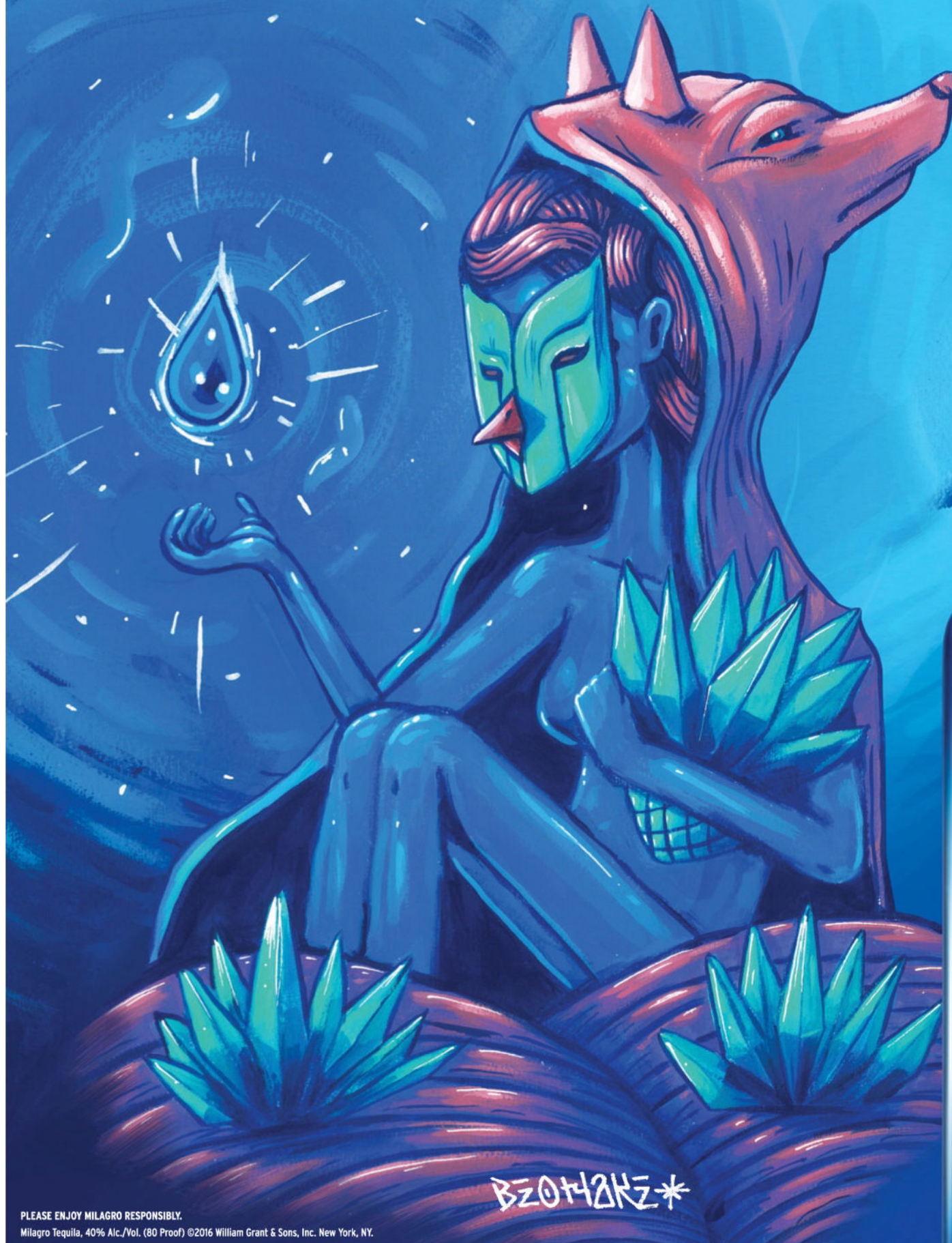
We know these moves are emotionally charged for many, especially Cuban Americans who have suffered—or who have family members or friends who have suffered—at the hands of the Castro government. And there are those who feel that Americans shouldn't visit Cuba, and that America's leader shouldn't be speaking with the government of Cuba.

It's time for a change. But change should come without compromising our beliefs. It's what the people of Cuba deserve, it's what the American people deserve and it's what the world deserves.

MARVIN R. SHANKEN
EDITOR & PUBLISHER

DAVID SAVONA
EXECUTIVE EDITOR

AGAVE EXPRESSIONISM



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Milagro Tequila, 40% Alc./Vol. (80 Proof) ©2016 William Grant & Sons, Inc. New York, NY.



MILAGRO MEANS MIRACLE

out of the humidor

Dear Marvin,

I've been reading your magazine for a few years. Being from Canada I can travel to Cuba whenever I please (I live in a free country) and I go there about eight times per annum. I get my cigars from a Cuban amigo who is a roller at the La Corona factory. Cuban cigars are severely overpriced as you know, so this offsets that.

I have just a little pet peeve about your magazine—watches. I like fine things but a \$35,000 watch? Every cell phone has the time. Most young people don't wear watches for that reason. For travel purposes I wear a \$30 Timex Indiglo and it keeps the exact same time as any Rolex.

Your Cuban editions are very good but they highlight only the most expensive restaurants and hotels. I could take you on a tour of Havana that would be more interesting by far and cost you much less. How about a great B&B at \$25 per night instead of your recommended hotel at \$250 per night? How about a great dinner at a private paladar for \$7 (bring your own wine) instead of La Guarida at \$70? And on and on and on.

Keep up the good work, but please, no more watches.

Nick Enns

St. Thomas, Ontario, Canada

Editors' Response: We disagree with a few of your opinions. Cuban cigars are quite expensive in your home of Canada due to taxes, but not in Havana. A Montecristo No. 2 can be had in proper Cuban cigar stores for around \$10. Buying from friends in Cuba might get you something less expensive to smoke, but you run the risk of getting a fake. Cigars bought in unofficial channels might not be a proper blend, they may have been rolled in someone's home rather than in a cigar factory and they could even expose you to beetle problems. We wouldn't take such a risk to save a few dollars.

As for watches, we celebrate fine timepieces because they are extraordinary, handmade creations—much like cigars. And, yes, we feature watches that retail for \$30,000 and even more, but we do also showcase those that sell for less. CIGAR AFICIONADO is, and always has been, about the finest things in life. If you only indulge in the least expensive product or service, you're missing out on some glorious things in our world, and that goes for Cuba and elsewhere.



"All three of these men have a special place in my heart, but my father holds the biggest. Thanks for allowing the Big Smoke to bring us all together."

—Jeff Kolbe, Lockport, New York

Dear Marvin,

I was just flipping through this issue and I absolutely loved the article "Meet the Estefans" [April 2016]. A fantastic article at a poignant time with our president just visiting Cuba.

Hopefully Emilio will get his wish to perform in a free Cuba! With all the political hoopla on immigration, this story needs to be shared.

Sylvana Marcello

Submitted via Facebook

Dear Marvin,

As a Canadian my wife and I travel to Cuba for two weeks every year. We find the people very proud and friendly. Can't wait to go back.

John S. Holmes

Windsor, Ontario, Canada

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E-MAIL letters@cigaraficionado.com • **LETTERS** 825 8th Ave., 33rd floor, New York, NY 10019 • **EDITORS' BLOGS** Find out what the editors of CIGAR AFICIONADO are thinking—and smoking—in our editors' blogs. David Savona, Gordon Mott, Jack Bettridge, Gregory Mottola and Andrew Nagy want to hear from you. The conversation is taking place on cigaraficionado.com.

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Dear Marvin,

I recently visited Cuba, staying both in Havana and Trinidad. People ask, "Did I enjoy my stay in Cuba?" As much as I would like to say yes, my answer generally is that I found the trip informative and educational. So overwhelming was the decay and poverty that it tainted what might otherwise have been enjoyable. I also overheard a number of people at the airport saying that they wanted to visit Cuba before it changed. Hopefully, Cuba will change with the influx of American tourists and the end of the embargo when that occurs, but I would not expect change to be immediate.

It is very doubtful that President Obama will see the real Cuba, the utter decay and poverty that permeates this island nation. For our president to make this trip without Cuba making major changes in its policies is a travesty. Whatever monies American industries will pay Cuba, whether it be in the form of wages for its workers or taxes, is unlikely to filter down to the Cuban people.

*Stanley Imerman
Encino, California*

Dear Marvin,

In November I was able to cross a big item from my bucket list. I was able to attend the 2015 Las Vegas Big Smoke with my father, my best friend and my brother-in-law. While it wasn't my first Big Smoke, it stands out as the best. All of these men are unique in their own way and have a special place in my heart.

My brother-in-law is a firefighter and Mercy Flight paramedic who puts his life on the line every day and works to save people in need. My best friend Scott is a retired Marine who dedicated 26 years to his country and left as a Master Gunnery Sergeant. To this day, he is the most dedicated friend and loyal patriot I know. Then there is my father. For almost 20 years he has been the sole caretaker of my mother. In 1996, she suffered a major stroke which left her unable to speak and with little mobility. For the past 50 years, especially the last 20, he has taken care of my mother and shown me the real meaning of commitment and dedication, and the true meaning of "Till death do us part."

My sisters and I were able to join together and make it possible to send my father to the Big Smoke. This was the first time he had been on a plane, the first time west of the Mississippi, the first time without my mother for longer than a couple of days. All three of these men have a special place in my heart, but my father holds the biggest. Thanks for allowing the Big Smoke to bring us all together to enjoy time together.

Thanks for giving us a forum to gather. I am forever grateful.

*Jeff Kolbe
Lockport, New York*

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surprised palates and weakened knees.
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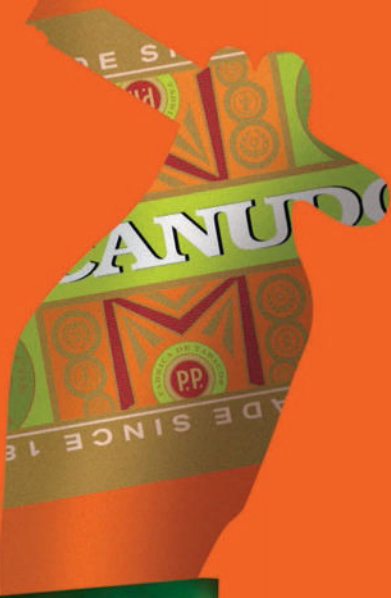
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good life guide

Living well demands that we indulge in things that are of superior quality and excellent origin. This guide aspires to find and recommend the best of everything to aficionados of the good life.

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BRING the PASSION[®]

Compact Humidors

Cabinet humidors may be the central command stations for connoisseurs with a collection, but don't overlook the convenience of having a few satellite humidors on hand for the office, vacation home or anywhere else cigars are enjoyed. Unlike your primary humidor, which keys on capacity, secondary humidors should be versatile—both compact and elegant—as well as portable, so they can be displayed on your desktop and seamlessly tucked into your duffel bag for a weekend excursion.

Travel humidors needn't forgo style for the sake of durability. Case in point: Davidoff of Geneva's Voyager humidor (\$1,290, pictured at right) exhibits an opulent simplicity in its on-the-go design. The macassar exterior (also available in rosewood) contains a very subtle coat of matte finishing, giving it a fashionably rustic look. Rounded edges, designed for easy handling, offer a sleek contrast to pointed rectangular humidors. And heavy-strength magnets, which seal the lid, enhance the minimalist aesthetic by obviating the need for straps or buckles.

Humidor craftsman Daniel Marshall also understands the need for compact elegance, which is why he created the fittingly named Desktop/Travel Humidor (\$250, left). Marshall's smaller humidors include all the refinements of his larger offerings, but are scaled down to fit about 20 cigars alongside their built-in humidification systems. Handmade in

California, the Desktop/Travel Humidor boasts a precious burl-wood exterior coated with Marshall's "trademark 1,000-coat lacquer finish." If you're looking to get the most storage out of a compact humidor, the Daniel Marshall option has the depth to stack two layers of smokes, in contrast to the Voyager, which accommodates one layer of about 10 cigars.

For those who travel light or are short on space, an economical option may be a stand-up cylinder humidor, such as the Cylinder Desk Humidor (\$199, center) from Brizard & Co. Known for crafting cigar accessories from exotic woods, Brizard's Cylinder is available in five different varieties—wenge, zebrawood, macassar, bubinga (shown), and rosewood—as well as an assortment of leathers. The cylinder holds 10 to 15 cigars inside a Spanish-cedar lining and includes a removable four-prong divider. The lid is secured by a screw cap—which includes a built-in humidification device—keeping your cigars fresh and intact during transit.

If you have any apprehensions about tarnishing such beautiful wood exteriors while traveling, Davidoff's Voyager humidor includes a leather carrying case, while the Daniel Marshall Travel/Desktop Humidor and Brizard & Co.'s Cylinder Desk Humidor come with travel pouches for additional protection.

Visit davidoff.com, danielmarshall.com and brizardandco.com

—Blake Droesch





Vodka by the Grain (and Grape)

In the world of vodka marketing much is made of the multiple times it may be distilled and filtered, but that downplays the core factor that gives the spirit its character: the fermented plants that start the process. They deserve a closer look.

Vodka can be made from any vegetation that can be fermented—and yes, there is a hemp vodka. But most premium vodkas stick to grains and potatoes, with grapes gathering a following of late.

There's little need to dispel the old notion that all vodka is strictly made from potatoes (that type is actually in the minority). But spuds yield a distinct taste and have a long tradition—especially in Poland, where Chopin (\$30) is made. But they are by no means limited geographically. (Woody Creek, \$37, is made in Colorado and Karlsson's Gold, \$35, comes from Sweden.) Chopin is so convinced of the importance of source material that it also makes rye and wheat vodkas as counterpoint. Potato, with its earthy, oily notes, is probably the type that James Bond had in mind to contrast the gin in his Vesper cocktail creation.

Rye is a grain that yields a characteristic spiciness. It informs such formidable vodkas as Belvedere (\$35) and Effen (\$30), and is partnered

with wheat in Stolichnaya Elit (\$69). Its subtle bite is the element that makes it right for standing up to the righteous flavors in a Bloody Mary.

Such characteristically smooth vodkas as Grey Goose (\$30), Ketel One (\$26) and Hammer + Sickle (\$20) feature wheat. They make good backdrops when the point is to feature a secondary ingredient like the vermouth in a Martini made with vodka in place of gin. Sensitivity to gluten has popularized corn in a similar capacity. Tito's (\$19) from Texas and the Canadian Crystal Head (\$50), with the skull-shaped bottle, are examples. Stoli recently announced that it would market a corn and buckwheat vodka of its own. Reyka (\$30) mixes wheat and barley.

Leaving the grain arena all together are eau-de-vie vodkas based on grapes, such as Cîroc (with Sean Combs as a partner, see cover story, \$30). Grapes are also a component in California's Hangar 1 (\$35). Consider their floral/fruity character when making Champagne cocktails.

If you remain unswayed about the importance of grain in a vodka's taste, consider that one scientist avoided taste altogether, inventing a powdered vodka for use in pills. Doesn't sound like much fun.

—Jack Bettridge

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Cordevalle Resort

Just south of San Jose, California and not far off the 101 freeway in the modest village of San Martin is the Cordevalle Resort, a golf destination with a rich championship history that will soon add another chapter when the U.S. Women's Open is played there this July.

Cordevalle is a resort that feels much more like a private club. As you sit outside one of its sumptuous accommodations overlooking the course, you will see many players late in the day walking rather than riding, playing the game the way it was meant to be.

The Robert Trent Jones Jr. golf course, set in the golden foothills of the coastal mountains, has held PGA Tour and amateur events. It's a pure California golf experience. "It's a beautiful core course," says Jones. "It wasn't built to sell houses."

Instead, it was built to entertain its resort and club players, while giving substantial options for tournament use. It flows beautifully through the valley and up the slope and passes by the resort's winery.

Adding to the clubby feel of it all are the rooms, suites and fairway homes. It's small scale, just 45 rooms, and everything seems intimate and personal. Every accommodation, on a ridge above the ninth fairway, allows views of the course, as well as the option to step outside on a terrace late in the day for a cigar and glass of wine as players make their way below you.

You will find the usual high-end appointments with lush bedding,

elegant décor, regal bathrooms, comfy furniture and high-tech TVs, plus plenty of space. The smallest rooms measure 550 square feet. The fairway homes have four bedrooms and 3,100 square feet, ideal for buddy trips.

One aspect that isn't so usual is original artwork, found in the rooms and throughout the property. The resort calls its collection "Celebration of Life: Spirituality" and within it you will find the works of Dan Namingha, depicting the traditions of the Tewa-Hopi tribe, bronze sculptures by John Kennedy and oils by William Clutz, John Ferren and H. Joe Waldrum.

For a small resort the dining options are fairly wide ranging. The One Iron Bar is a communal gathering place that tends to get lively late in the afternoon. Elegant dinner can be had at Il Vigneto. Lion's Peak Grill offers al fresco and snacks and casual food served out of the golf shop area.

While golf is at Cordevalle's heart, there is an impressive tennis facility, a spa and the winery. The Monterey Peninsula (Pebble Beach, Carmel-by-the-Sea, wine country) is within an hour's drive, and just down the road is Gilroy, the proclaimed garlic capital of the world and the site of an annual festival celebrating the savory bulb.

But make no mistake, celebrating the game of golf and the good life are Cordevalle's *raison d'être*.

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—Jeff Williams



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Black Beauties

Black is anything but basic, when it comes to watches. Not only does a dark cloak bring a slick and sporty persona to even the most classic models, but it can confer state-of-the-art toughness. For instance, the same vacuum process used to adhere low-friction coatings to Formula 1 engine parts—Physical Vapor Deposition (PVD)—is often used to blacken watch components. However, with timepieces, the goal is often hardness and scratch resistance, and for that DLC (Diamond-Like Carbon) is the coating of choice. Herein are three watches endowed with the durability of DLC.

Perhaps no watch design exhibits the aforementioned personality change more than Cartier's 42-mm Ballon Bleu de Cartier Carbon (\$6,600, pictured at left) in stainless steel with Diamondblack ADLC, an amorphous DLC coating used by Cartier. The über-elegant Ballon Bleu gets a hip makeover in matte black with a black dial that makes the red secondhand pop. A calfskin strap embossed to resemble fabric furthers the sporty appeal. Cartier also applied ADLC to the bold, square Santos 100 Carbon (\$7,600), in a similarly monochromatic version with a red secondhand. Cartier's 1847 MC movement, an entry-level in-house caliber that debuted in 2015's Clé de Cartier, powers both pieces.

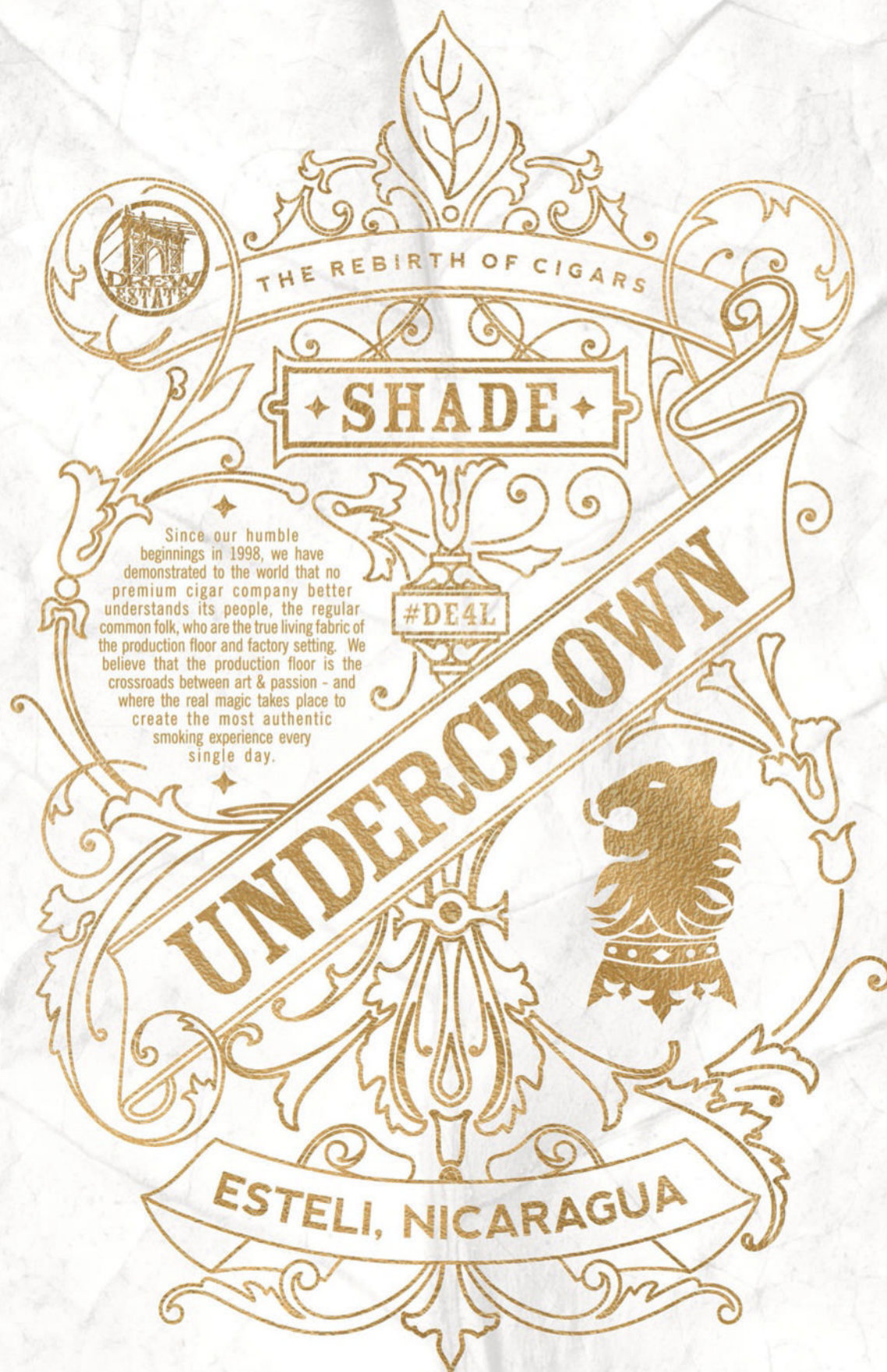
Bulgari's Octo Solotempo Ultranero (\$7,400, center) displays the Italian house's flagship design with a glossy black-lacquer dial appointed with eye-catching pink-gold accents for a look that is at once elegant and sporty, thanks to an integrated rubber strap. The coating is not only Ultranero ("very black"), it plays up the many facets of the very slim (10.4-mm thick) octagonal case that suggests its name. The Ultranero treatment has also been applied to a chronograph and to the Octo Finissimo Tourbillon, which claims the record of world's thinnest tourbillon at a mere 5 mm.

Carl F. Bucherer reinforced not only the brawny (46.6-mm) stainless-steel case of its Patravi TravelTec Black (\$15,700, right) with a scratch-resistant matte black DLC coating, but the robust metal bracelet as well. The chronometer-certified chronograph displays three time zones, with two time zones shown on the dial and the third indicated by a red GMT-hand pointing to a rotating 24-hour scale on the flange. It can easily be adjusted forward or backward using the patented monopusher.

In the watch realm, black may be technologically trendy, but it carries with it a valuable fashion maxim: black never goes out of style.

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—Laurie Kahle



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As a Cuban immigrant that came to the USA in a little boat when he was only 15 years old, Rafael had many memories of his native Cuba, but none as strong as the aroma of the Cuban cigars his grandfather used to smoke every day in the little park next to his house.

Rafael blended countless combinations of different tobaccos and had other people smoke them. He would sit back and savor the aromas until one particular blend finally matched his memories. The same aroma of those Cubans cigars his grandfather smoked.

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Monk-Strap Shoes

More daring than a Derby and less formal than an Oxford, the monk strap is a versatile dress shoe that pairs just as well with a bespoke suit as it does a blazer and jeans. Characterized by its distinct lack of laces, the monk strap opts for a simple strap-and-buckle design (single-buckle, double-buckle and even triple-buckle varieties abound) which typically can be tightened or loosened over the tongue of the shoe by adjusting one or more notches.

Legend has it that the monk-strap shoe descends from the footwear of European monks, whose sandals and closed-toe work shoes boasted the iconic strap-and-buckle fixture. Centuries later, the monk strap has become a powerful accessory in fashion and popular culture—even James Bond wears monk-strap shoes in the movies, looking stylish as he saves the world from terrorist threats. Quite the trajectory for a shoe of such humble origins—but simple design speaks to the instincts of timeless style, and the monk-strap shoe is decidedly here to stay.

Supposing you're not a secret agent, monk-strap shoes still look best with a suit or dressed down with jeans or chinos (try rolling your pant

cuff one or two turns up in the summer, with or without socks).

The greatest strength of the monk strap is its adaptability, and different styles of monk are better suited to individual taste and preference. Hugo Boss (bottom left, \$425) offers an edgier, more modern take on the monk with a double-buckle shoe in black with textured vamp. Cole Haan (middle left, \$260) delivers a handsome double monk with broguing around the quarters and toe in slightly two-tone brown. For a sleek, understated look, consider the J.M. Weston (top, \$895) single monk strap in black.

The black double monk from Kenneth Cole (top right, \$195) boasts a classic toe cap, and finally, for those seeking an air of elegance, try the French calfskin pair from Stefano Bemer (bottom right, \$1,500), luxuriously tanned a deep-red sangria and touting a single monk strap made from sharkskin.

Visit colehaan.com, hugoboss.com, jmweston.fr/en, kennethcole.com and stefanobemersrl.com

—David Clough

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2017 Acura NSX

The old two-lane road climbs rapidly out of the desert and into the mountains, high enough to find patches of snow from the previous night's storm. For most drivers, it's a treacherous way to leave Palm Springs, but we wouldn't consider any other option while driving the reborn Acura NSX.

First introduced in 1990, the two-seater was the first true Japanese supercar—indeed, the first sports car from anywhere to use all-aluminum construction. But the design grew dated and, unable to come up with a suitable replacement, Acura pulled the NSX off the market in 2005. Fans have been lamenting that decision ever since, though they were buoyed by news that the nameplate would return for 2017.

The new NSX is a sleeker, more stylish and lavishly equipped sports car than the original, with a low and menacing nose and broad air scoops behind each of the doors. It needs that air to feed and cool one of the most complex powertrains ever put on the road. The new model pairs a twin-turbo V-6 with three electric motors. Together, they produce a peak output of 500 horsepower and 406 pound-feet of torque. But those numbers don't tell the full story. Unlike an internal combustion engine that has to build RPMs up, electric motors produce 100 percent of their tire-spinning torque almost instantly, as you discover switching the DRIVER CONTROL system to LAUNCH CONTROL. Push both pedals to the floor and then release the brake to get a sensation not unlike blasting off from an aircraft carrier, racing to 60 in barely three seconds.

The unusual powertrain layout offers other advantages. The system

creates what Acura calls electronic SUPER-HANDLING ALL-WHEEL-DRIVE. In practice, it's a far more elegant system than that awkward name implies. The turbo V-6 and one of the motors power the rear axle. The other motors are mounted on the front axle. Not only do you get better traction on wet or icy pavement, but this helps steer you through even the tightest of corners more agilely than you'd imagine possible. In a hard turn, the motor on the inner front wheel slows down, the one on the outer wheel speeding up, something technically known as torque vectoring.

The sensually sculpted exterior is matched by a brilliantly executed interior, with the right blend of luxury and performance cues. For the most part, the little details—like the seamless wrapping of the steering wheel—are spot on. Our only complaint is the touch-screen display shared with such no-frills models as the Fit minicar sold by Acura's parent Honda.

The complex powertrain and all the other features found on the 2017 Acura NSX have driven the base price up to \$158,000. But we're expecting few buyers will get away that cheap. Add the carbon-ceramic brakes, the carbon-fiber roof and all the other accessories and you'll be nudging \$210,000. That puts the Japanese rocket into competition with some of Europe's best, including entries from the likes of Lamborghini and Aston Martin. While Acura doesn't have quite the pedigree, however, the uniqueness of the NSX and its raw performance are likely to win fans, much as the original model did a quarter-century ago.

Visit nsx.acura.com

—Paul A. Eisenstein



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Wilson Staff C200 Golf Irons

The nine holes bored through the heads of Wilson Staff's new C200 golf irons may look like an assembly mistake, but rest assured, they are there by design. The voids, dubbed Power Holes by the people at Wilson, are the key behind the C200's revolutionary new FLX Face technology, a radical advancement in club design that we found markedly improves both distance and accuracy, without sacrificing feel or durability.

The concept behind the FLX Face design is to minimize the point of impact between the club's face and the rest of the head, thus allowing for maximum bend when the ball is struck. To achieve this, Wilson bore the nine slots through the club head and attached the face to only 24 percent of it, meaning three-quarters of the face is disconnected.

The Power Holes aren't literally holes—or else the C200 irons would violate the legal club parameters laid out by the United States Golf Association. Rather, the voids have been filled in with TE031 urethane, a substance that provides excellent feedback, sound and feel to the player. Additionally, the face is made from 17-4 stainless steel, a strong, flexible material.

Wilson created the C200 irons to help mid-to-high handicap players hit the ball farther with more consistency. After a few trips to the range, we found the irons add about four to eight yards to each club, a remarkable feat considering the lofts haven't been ramped up, but are industry standard. However, while more distance is always appreciated, we most enjoyed the feel and feedback of the C200 irons, as it was easy to tell if a ball was hit flush or more towards the toe.

The Lamkin Crossline grips that come with the clubs are more than comfortable, if only a bit slick for our taste, while the stock KBS Tour 90 steel shafts, which are also standard in length and come in regular and stiff versions, feel durable. Wilson also offers a graphite shaft option with Aldila's Rogue Pro series in three flex options.

A complete set of C200 irons comprises eight clubs, 4 iron through pitching wedge, with a gap wedge included. The stainless-steel shaft set runs for \$799, while the graphite shaft version goes for \$899. They are available at golf shops everywhere, or direct from Wilson.

Visit wilson.com

—Andrew Nagy





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LG Signature OLED 4K TV G6

To all the cinephiles and visual snobs who have been defiantly clutching precious plasmas, boasting about the superiority of “infinite blacks” and the like: The time has come to upgrade your television, for the age of OLED is upon us. And yes, it’s spectacular.

Organic light-emitting diode (OLED) monitors can achieve truly perfect, inky blacks and infinite contrast ratios. That’s because each individual pixel in an OLED TV generates both light and color or switch off entirely. (Other flat-screen technologies produce images by merely shining light through color filters.) Add that OLEDs can be almost impossibly thin and offer extremely large fields of view (about 170 degrees), and you have a groundbreaking technology.

But wait, OLEDs started trickling into the market about four years ago, so why is it news now? First, the technology has matured in the time it took manufacturers to figure out consumers didn’t want 3-D TV or curved screens; second, 2016 models bring an innovation called HDR, or high dynamic range, which dramatically boosts highlights and shadows to make images pop with lifelike appeal.

Leading the HDR charge is LG with its new Signature G6 models, though makers Samsung and Sony aren’t too far behind. Measuring a

mere 8.4 millimeters thin with a panel that holds 8.3 million pixels, the G6 comes in a 65-inch version (\$7,999) and a 77-inch goliath (\$24,999), both of which feature a forward-facing sound bar from Harman/Kardon that delivers killer bass and treble. (When the monitor is mounted on a wall, the sound bar flips down in a nifty fashion.) And the G6 sports LG’s webOS, now in its 3.0 iteration, which uses LG’s popular Magic remote control, which means you can breeze between live television and streaming services such as Hulu, Netflix, Amazon Prime and HBO GO.

What really sets the G6 apart from other OLEDs isn’t its 4K Ultra HD resolution (four times the pixels of 1080p monitors), but the fact that it’s the only OLED that currently supports the two leading HDR formats: HDR10 and Dolby Vision™ HDR. Amazon already shoots all its original series shows using HDR10, while Netflix plans to start the practice. On the other hand, many films, such as *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* and *Mad Max: Fury Road*, were graded with Dolby Vision™, with more to come. Why choose? With G6, you’ll have both formats covered, making it a virtually future-proof purchase.

Visit lg.com

—Andrew Nagy





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Rare Coins

Many of us kept coin collections as kids, tucking nickels and dimes into the designated slots in cardboard holders, hoping for something worth a little more than face value. On May 24, when the D. Brent Pogue Collection Part IV goes off at New York's Sotheby's, it will outpace any young collector's wildest dream: an 1822 Half Eagle, estimated to sell for up to \$7 million, and an 1804 dollar pegged at \$7 million to \$10 million. If they come close, their return on investment will be staggering. (The former coin was last purchased in 1982 for a mere \$687,500.)

It may seem that absolutely no relationship exists between a youngster's hoarding of coins and the sale of these magnificent specimens of numismatics. But John Pack, executive director of consignments for Stack's Bowers Galleries, which is curating the sale, says the same sort of passion ignites both. Coins are durable pieces of history that have a visceral connection to "where they have been and who may have handled something like this."

While monetary value is implicit in coins, the lure for collectors is often very different—and personal. Pack points out that some seek coins that have a connection to coins of their youth, maybe thinking: "Gee, I remember I used to handle those coins on my paper route. Now, I can afford to collect them." Some have collections that center on anything and everything arising from one specific date. Others specialize in very individual specimens like coins that are toned, or colored, in specific ways.

Condition is not the be-all-and-end-all. Many collectors only want coins that have been circulated as "those are the ones that made the country run," says Pack. However, while the 1804 dollar slated for the upcoming sale never was circulated, it has an interesting backstory. Despite its date, it was struck circa 1834 for President Andrew Jackson as a diplomatic gift to the Sultan of



Muscat. As dollar coins weren't made at that time, the Philadelphia Mint traced back to the last time they were produced and struck new copies.

While rarity contributes to value, it is balanced against how famous an item is. There are pieces that are much rarer than the aforementioned two, but don't approach them in notoriety and so are not as valuable. Provenance too is important, so collectors track very carefully who may have once owned a coin. And they crave the ones that have a story attached, says Pack. Part of his job is to track that down.

An "Antiques Roadshow" phenomenon also exists, and Pack welcomes inquiries from people who have coins that were dug up or found



Curator John Pack examines coins expected to sell for record prices at auction: The 1822 Half Eagle, left, and the 1804 dollar, above and below.

hidden in furniture. Most don't pan out, but it is not inconceivable that something "quite magnificent" may be discovered.

D. Brent Pogue pursued every U.S. coin ever struck, but Pack advises collectors to examine their own interests and focus on a period, a denomination or even a motif. Books on collecting are your first source of information—then go to dealers and auctioneers. The Smithsonian Institute also has a wealth of coins on display. However you get there, you're in good company. As Pack observes, it is the "hobby of kings," or at least people who can afford to own money with no intention of ever spending it.

Visit stacksbowers.com and sothebys.com

—Jack Bettridge





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In his day, singer James Brown was known as the hardest-working man in show business. He never had to compete for the title with Sean Combs.

Even his name keeps him busy: In the course of a career that started in 1990, Combs has been known as Puff Daddy, Puffy, P. Diddy and just plain Diddy. Listening to Combs talk about his various businesses, it seems plausible that those names reference a small army of clones he uses to keep the numerous branches of the Combs empire operating smoothly.

He has a record company and a TV network, works in the recording studio producing for other artists as well as making records of his own, heads up the Sean John clothing and fragrance lines, is involved with two premium liquor brands and more.

Sitting in his dressing room at a photo studio space near Los Angeles' MacArthur Park, Combs is pondering a question about time management when he is interrupted by a text. "Sorry, it's my girlfriend," he says, tapping out a quick message. First things first.

He is 46, but with his shades off, his smile is surprisingly boyish. He has the build of a former athlete, not massive like a linebacker, but solid and fleet looking like a defensive back, a position he played with aplomb at Mount St. Michael Academy in the Bronx. More recently, he showed his athletic prowess by running the New York City Marathon in a respectable four hours and 15 minutes.

He sits atop an empire that seems to expand annually, with a family that includes six children from three women. For all he has done, Combs has many things he still wants to do and not enough time in which to do them.

"I definitely wish there were more hours in the day," he says.

Even at a photo shoot, Combs is the hub of a surprisingly vast collection of enterprises that constantly pull at him. While he changes clothes between setups, he's also talking to his manager about upcoming and ongoing projects. The phone in his pocket may be on silent mode but you can practically feel the energy emanating from it, as it's bombarded by texts and e-mails.

Forbes magazine estimated Combs' net worth at \$735 million last year, putting him at the top of its list of the world's richest hip-hop artists. When stacked up against all musicians in 2015, he was the eighth-highest-paid, at \$60 million, and he was the only one who did it without the benefit of a tour.

But there is far more to his ventures than music alone. Combs Enterprises comprises a number of divisions, including a talent and marketing agency, his affiliations with Cîroc Vodka and DeLeón Tequila, REVOLT TV, Bad Boy Records, and Sean John fashions and fragrance. Most recently, he, Ron Burkle and Mark Wahlberg jointly acquired Aqua Hydrate, an alkaline-rich performance water (and pledged a donation of a million bottles for the water-needy citizens of Flint, Michigan.) How does he decide what fits the Sean Combs template?

"If it's not authentic or in my wheelhouse, I shy away from it," Combs

explains. "Everything is part of creating this dream, creating this world: that, when you get up in the club to dance, you're dancing to a record from my label, you have on a Sean John suit, you're wearing Sean John cologne—and you're drinking Cîroc. Or it's after work and you kick back and watch REVOLT, and you're drinking DeLeón.

"It's the dream of creating a world, creating a lifestyle for this generation's culture, which a lot of people underestimate."

"He's built his brand as a discerning arbiter of style," says Dia Simms, president of Combs Wine & Spirits, a division of Combs Enterprises. "He's not espousing any product he doesn't believe in. There's an incredible responsibility when people listen to you like that. There's a quote [by the late Gen. Omar Bradley] that reminds me of him: 'We need to learn to set our course by the stars, and not by the light of every passing ship.'"





There's not a business school that can teach you to do what he does."

What he does is get behind products and projects with a passion and an understanding that achieve results. One of those products is the high-end vodka, Cîroc. When Combs partnered with the brand's parent company, Diageo, to raise awareness and lend his face to the advertising, sales skyrocketed.

"When he got involved with Cîroc, they were working on getting the brand to sell 400,000 cases a year," says Simms. "Sean met with the distributors and said, 'I'm going to sell a million cases.' And then they sold two million."

Today, Combs's success has put him in the enviable position of not having to worry about having more coming in.

"I can make money," Combs says. "But I can't make time. It's Friday

today—but it feels like it was just Friday night yesterday. When I think about time, it's important for me to be as present as possible. That's a journey I started going on when I realized that time was ticking. You get to halftime in your life and realize that it's important to live in the present because life is short."

Born in Harlem, Combs was reared in Mount Vernon, New York, by a single mother who moved there when Sean was 12. His father died when he was only two years old. Though his mother told young Sean that his father had died in a car accident, Combs later uncovered a newspaper clipping about his father's funeral, which revealed that the elder Combs was actually a drug dealer who'd been murdered in a gangland hit.

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Combs has been well rewarded for his wide-ranging work. Clockwise from top left: receiving a 2009 NAACP Image Award, overcoming his fear to act onstage in *A Raisin in the Sun* in 2004, being honored in 2014 by Howard University and getting a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame in 2008.

Growing up without a father, Combs says, helped shape his approach to being a parent.

"I have such a deep appreciation at being able to be a father," he says. "My father didn't get the chance to be there for me. That makes me appreciate the opportunity that much more deeply. I stress the importance of that to my kids—that you can't take having a family for granted."

Religion played a big role in his upbringing. "I was an altar boy," he says. "I was baptized as both a Catholic and a Baptist. When I was growing up, we had a whole day of church on Sunday. So yeah, I was brought up in the faith." Those lessons remain, and prayer is part of his daily ritual. "But I'm not a religious person," he says. "I consider myself a spiritual person. I see a division between being religious and being spiritual."

The women who raised him also instilled him with a powerful work ethic. His mother worked three jobs and his grandmother worked two. Combs earned as well, running several paper routes while attending parochial school.

From an early age, Combs was caught up in popular music, particularly by the emerging rap and hip-hop culture: "I remember the first time I heard hip-hop: Frankie Crocker, this disc jockey on WBLS in New York,

played 'Rapper's Delight' by the Sugar Hill Gang for three hours straight—and it shook the world."

Initially an urban musical form, hip-hop became a phenomenon, muscling its way into popular culture 30 years ago, eventually becoming part of the mainstream. If you don't believe it, look at who's starring in major studio movies: former rappers like Ice Cube, Will Smith, Queen Latifah and Combs himself, who has acted in several films and who starred on Broadway in a well-received revival of Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun*.

Turn on the TV and it's the same story: LL Cool J on "NCIS: Los Angeles," Ice-T on "Law & Order: Special Victims Unit." Jay-Z hobnobs with President Obama, who has quoted the rapper's lyrics. So does Combs, who interviewed Barack Obama, then a candidate for the U.S. Senate, at the Democratic National Convention in 2004 for MTV and told him on the air, "You should run for president."

But it took society more than a decade to recognize hip-hop as the art form and, eventually, the influence it has become.

"For a long time, people understood hip-hop as being something gangsta, something black, something street," Combs says. "But it's the



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“I can make money but I can’t make time. You get to halftime in your life and realize it’s important to live in the present, because life is short.”



Combs on stage. He owns two Grammy Awards, and is preparing to record his final album.

only form of music that can mesh with every other form of music. I think people underestimate the kids who listen to it. It is a generational thing and what kids like is the fact that it’s so honest. The greatest songs are the most honest, the most genuine. And because it was so honest, so raw, so naked, it took over the masses. You had to be that honest on the records. Plus, hip-hop gives you the opportunity to put more words and feeling into a song than any other genre.

“Nobody could have predicted how big hip-hop would be. I don’t think people understand how big it can get. It’s not just a lifestyle but a culture—and it’s generational.”

Combs’ entry into the music business dates back to his days as a college student, when he applied to be an intern at Uptown Records.

“Heavy D introduced him to me at Uptown,” recalls Andre Harrell, formerly of Uptown and now vice chairman of Combs’ REVOLT network. “Heavy never recommended anyone, so for him to recommend Sean meant a lot. Sean was dressed in a white shirt and tie, with this Kid ’n Play high-top fade haircut. And he was very polite. He said, ‘I’ve researched your company and I think I’m best-suited to work here for you.’ So I gave him an opportunity as a summer intern. In the fall, he had to go back to

school at Howard University, but he still came up to work in the office twice a week, working for the A&R person. When the A&R person left for Columbia Records, Puffy took me to lunch to talk—and asked for the job. As it turned out, the guy who was leaving had already recommended that I hire him. He was pretty happy to hear that; he was 19 or 20.”

After three years with Uptown Records, he left to start his own label, Bad Boy Records, taking his good friend, rapper Notorious B.I.G., with him. He had almost instant success with the late rapper, as well as Craig Mack, singer Faith Evans and rappers like Mase and The Lox. Combs created a production team that worked with a variety of artists: Mary J. Blige, Usher, TLC, Mariah Carey and Aretha Franklin, among others.

“He loved the culture,” Harrell says. “The ghetto-fabulous lifestyle, the dressing up and going to parties. I hire people who are of the culture we’re trying to reach. He was someone who could take a nothing day and make it into a party—and get a lot of people to show up for it. And he was a good dancer, so he had a great sense of music.”

Combs went on to make several albums of his own as a recording artist. He owns two Grammy Awards, including one for his biggest hit: “I’ll Be Missing You,” about the late B.I.G.



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Top 10/2014

EDICIÓN
LIMITADA 2010



Nº8
Top 10/2010

NEW WAVE RESERVA
BELICOSO D'OR



GOLOSOS
CORONA GORDA



Nº14
Top 25/2011

NEW WAVE RESERVA
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BEST VALUE
2011

Acting and movie producing followed. By 1998, he'd launched his fashion line and, in 2001, entered the realm of television production with the reality series "Making the Band" for MTV. He's never looked back, and has never been busier.

His antennae are acute and he is always on the lookout for areas in which to expand his business. Harrell explains how Combs works. "Everything he sees, he processes: Can I? Should I? Do I want to...? He has a little more insight than other people about the way music says something about the people who like it—and that all those things can be turned around and sold to them."

Simms points out that, in an age when corporations and corporate leaders tend to subject new ideas to endless polling and focus groups to minimize risk, Combs is confident in his own taste and instinct.

"He doesn't mind being the first one out there with an idea," she says. "He has the unique ability to see trends early. He's first, fast and fearless. He's not afraid to move forward when other people would be, particularly going after an audience of millennials that have not been successfully wooed in the past. And he does it by understanding his audience."

Combs has always kept a busy schedule, and his ability to pack what seems like a week's worth of activity into every 24-hour period is a fact of life to the people he works with.

"He's human, I think, but if he ever gets tired, he doesn't let it show," Simms says. "'Tired rhymes with fired' is the saying. He's a bit of an urban legend—sort of the Energizer Bunny."

Combs does try to take time out each week to let go of business and just relax with his kids: "That was one of the things I hoped for when I moved to L.A.: that we were all together out here," he says. "It helped me get my priorities in order and focus on quality time with them."

Sundays are also his time for slowing down with a great cigar. Every Sunday he takes what he refers to as "me time," usually with a Cohiba, occasionally with a Montecristo. And sometimes he enjoys cigars during the week as well.

"That's the definition of a cigar for me: when you're comfortable, and don't want to feel stress," he says. "It calms the mind. It's something I've been doing for the past few years. I do my best to make sure I take that time."

Combs was mentored in the ways of fine tobacco by Larry Schwartz, who retired last year as president of Diageo North America. "He's like the godfather of the spirits business," Combs says with admiration of Schwartz. "He loves golf and smoking cigars. I'd go out on the golf course with him and he'd give me knowledge. I noticed that, at the end of the day, he'd smoke a cigar. And he would teach me how to do it. I learned that there's an art to it, from the way it's lit right down to the ash itself and the length of the ash."

He smokes with friends like rapper/business executive Jay-Z (who appeared on the cover of this magazine in 2009), music executive Steve Stoute, as well as rapper Nas. He associates smoking cigars with being "a mogul, a boss, a giant. That's who smokes cigars."

Of course, other people smoke cigars as well. "One of the first times I tried a cigar, a girl gave it to me," he says. "That's the sexiest thing, to see a woman smoking a cigar—and to have her share one with you."

His preferred brand is one that is familiar to all cigar lovers. "I was in the Bahamas at a friend's house. I had a great view of the ocean. I put my chair in the center of the veranda and enjoyed a Cohiba. It's probably a little bit of a cliché, but I figure I started out with one of the best. I took my time with it and just enjoyed it."



The Business of Sean Combs

Sean Combs has amassed a considerable business portfolio, ranging from music and television to beverages and clothing lines. Here is a rundown of his current ventures.

BEVERAGES

Cîroc Combs became the spokesperson for this French-made vodka in 2009, which is owned by Diageo. His marketing tactics are often credited for increasing sales considerably. It sold an estimated 1.6 million cases in 2015, according to Shanken's Impact Databank.

DeLeón Tequila brand

DeLeón was purchased in 2014 as an equal equity partnership between Diageo and Combs Wine & Spirits, an LLC formed by Combs after the success of Cîroc.

AQUAhydrate Launched in 2015, AQUAhydrate fitness water is Combs' most recent venture. He is an active investor and sitting board member alongside fellow rapper-turned-entrepreneur Mark Wahlberg.



CLOTHING

Sean John Founded in 1998, Sean John was one of Combs' first business ventures outside of music and has gone on to become one of his most profitable. The multifaceted clothing company, created and owned by Combs, inked an exclusive distribution deal with Macy's department stores in 2010 and claims annual retail sales of \$525 million.

Enyce A line of street-wear clothing that Combs acquired from Liz Claiborne Inc. in 2008.

ENTERTAINMENT

REVOLT The music cable network REVOLT TV was launched by Combs in 2013. It is broadcast by major cable companies, such as Time Warner Cable, Comcast and Verizon FiOS, in 46 of the top 50 U.S. markets.

—Blake Droesch

“When I’m gone, only the songs will survive. The only other thing like that is religion. The music will be here after I’m gone. That’s a lot of power.”



Combs with friend and fellow CIGAR AFICIONADO cover subject Jay-Z (top) and interviewing then-Senate-candidate Barack Obama in 2004.

Combs is eager to study the culture of cigars, and despite having smoked for some time, he still considers himself a student of the hobby. “From afar, I never understood cigars. Now I’m excited about the journey, about learning more about them.”

Music is at the center of everything he does, so Combs looks genuinely perplexed when asked what he’d be doing now if he hadn’t found such an instant foothold in the music industry. Then, without hesitation, he says, “I would probably be successful in some area of business, whether it was the nightclub industry or real estate. I’d be a businessman.

“But I never imagined music wouldn’t work out. It felt so much like what I was supposed to do. It was hard to imagine doing anything else.”

He is getting ready to record what he says will be his last album and vows to devote full-time to that process while it’s going on, even leaving the connected world behind. “I lock myself in the studio so I’ve got 100 percent focus,” he says. “I can’t even have a phone. If there’s a 911 call, they know how to get a hold of me. Otherwise, I just disconnect from the world.”

Combs is well aware of how quickly fashions change in the music industry; among other effects of the Internet on the music business (which have been huge), the viral nature of hot new work via social media means that careers rise and fall in the space of months, even weeks.

“Now there are so many young, young artists in the industry,” he says. “The age of the talent keeps getting younger. There are kids who are 13 who are ready—right now. The whole industry is getting younger.”

Yet Combs has no fear about his ability to establish a connection with an audience the same age as his children, even as he reconnects with his long-time followers. It’s been six years since his last album, 2010’s “Last Train to Paris,” though he released a mixtape album last year. But each year can be a lifetime in the attention span of that young audience.

“The way I have to come back is exciting to me,” he says of the album, tentatively titled “No Way Out 2,” as a nod to his first album, “No Way Out,” in 1997. “If you’re not putting out albums all the time, you have to come back in a way that grabs attention. People are always looking for what’s next—but the cream always rises to the top.

“I’m going to make it the most honest and best that I can. If I can be fearless with it, nothing can stop me.”

Harrell, for one, has no doubt that, once he sequesters himself in the studio, Combs will kill it and go out on a high note. Nor is there a question in his mind that a millennial audience will respond to the music of a middle-aged businessman.

“When you’re cool, that’s not something that dies away,” Harrell says. “That doesn’t get old. You’re just an old cool guy. Sean’s got an edge; he knows young people. He took a page from me and keeps a lot of young people around him.”

“I’m a 33-year-old trapped in a 46-year-old’s body,” Combs jokes.

Why stop making albums and performing as a musician now?

“I want to stop at a great place,” he says. “And a final album is a great place to stop. I want to take a victory lap, to do a world tour and really enjoy it one last time. And then I want to do different things and have different experiences.”

One thing to which he’d like to devote more time is acting. Since he moved from New Jersey to Los Angeles (where he bought a European-style villa near the Playboy Mansion in Holmby Hills for an estimated \$40 million in 2014), he’s been eager to get back to movie roles, particularly given the wherewithal of his own production company. But he wants to do it right.

“Coming out to L.A. and being around the art of acting, I realized it’s something you can’t have one foot in and one foot out,” he says. “So I’m going to put out my last album and devote 100 percent of my time to doing films.”

His experience working on Broadway in 2004 gave him increased respect for the craft. Doing eight shows a week in a straight dramatic play—not to mention a much-venerated classic—is much more intimidating, he admits, than doing a live concert.

“I’ve jumped out of an airplane and this was way scarier,” Combs says. “It was standing-room only. And there’s nothing harder than live theater. I had a great coach pushing me. Every night, I was trying to figure out how



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to find that freedom and nakedness, to find that character and deal with his insecurities. I mean, two of my costars won Tony Awards. It was one of the most beautiful experiences I've ever had.

"I feel honored even saying that I stood on a Broadway stage in this play by Lorraine Hansberry. That's crazy."

Having surmounted most of the challenges and achieved more than he ever imagined, Combs shows no signs of flagging. At this point—in the middle of a life of which half has been spent at the top of the heap—is there anything he hasn't done that he still would like to do?

"Retire," Combs says. "I want to enjoy my family and my kids. What would I do if I retired? I have no idea."

In the end, he says, his legacy is his music.

"When I'm gone, only the songs will survive," Combs notes. "I know I'm making music that will live on. I don't go into the studio just to be hot, or to hear myself on the radio. Michael Jackson, Tupac, Biggie—part of them lives on in their music, even though they're not here anymore. That's really deep, man. The only other thing like that is religion. People will be singing those songs forever. The music will be here after I'm gone. And that's a lot of power." ❖

Contributing editor Marshall Fine writes about film and entertainment at <https://www.facebook.com/hollywoodandfine>.



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The crowd went crazy when Rickie Fowler hit a hole-in-one at the Els for Autism Pro-Am, raising \$1 million with one swing.



The Shot Heard Round The World

RICKIE FOWLER'S \$1 MILLION HOLE-IN-ONE CAPPED
A RECORD ELS FOR AUTISM PRO-AM

BY DAVID SAVONA

The hole was the size of an orange, and sat more than 340 feet away. The stiff breeze made it seem longer. Around it, a green whose slopes, petite size and oblong shape made the task at hand even more difficult—finding that target with a hole-in-one.

One by one they tried, nearly 20 professional golfers, some of the world's best. It was the conclusion of the eighth annual Els for Autism

Pro-Am, hosted by *CIGAR AFICIONADO* and *Wine Spectator* magazines, and a hole-in-one would raise \$1 million for the charity at a time of great need. Some came close, drawing gasps and cheers from the crowd, followed by polite applause. But no ball ended up in the hole.

Ernie Els, whose son Ben was the inspiration for the event, had led the way. Now he stood with the microphone. "Is there anybody else?"



he asked, looking around. “Rickie, come up here.” Rickie Fowler, all five feet, nine inches of him, a mere 27 years old, stepped up to the tee. He had already put his gear away, so he borrowed a wedge from Luke Donald and a golf ball from Thomas Aiken. He didn’t have a golf glove. He swung, a gorgeous stroke.

“Rickie, stay on line!” said Els as the ball soared.

“Go in!” urged Els, as the ball hopped on the green. And amazingly it went into the hole.

The crowd erupted.

In a moment that went viral on social media and was widely covered by ESPN, the Golf Channel and a host of other outlets, Fowler dropped the club as his fellow pros and the players from the tournament shouted in joy and rushed toward him. Ernie Els, the Big Easy, grabbed Fowler in a bear hug and lifted him in the air.

That hole in one—sponsored by Ketel One Vodka and SAP—had earned \$1 million for the Els for Autism Foundation.

“It was utter hysteria when Rickie one-hopped the ball into the cup. We all went wild in celebration,” says Marvin R. Shanken, editor and publisher of *CIGAR AFICIONADO* and *Wine Spectator*. “Best day of the year!”

Els was beaming with pride as he stood near the tee box. “This man—he is my hero,” he said of Fowler. “The hairs on my arm are still standing up.”

“I can’t put into words how much it means,” said Ernie’s wife, Liezl.

“What an awesome day and moment that was!” said Fowler in a text message sent after the event to Shanken. “Special. One of the coolest moments I have ever been a part of.” (To read a profile on Fowler, turn to page 72.)

The exciting finish capped a great day of golf, a Pro-Am created by Shanken and Ernie and Liezl Els. Held on a breezy day at Old Palm Golf

“What an awesome day! Special. One of the coolest moments I have ever been a part of.” —**RICKIE FOWLER**



Club in Palm Beach Gardens, Florida, the Pro-Am paired 66 amateurs with 21 of the biggest names in golf.

The charity had raised \$7 million before that shot. The focus of the charity has been the creation of the Els Center of Excellence, a school for children with autism. The lower school opened last August, serving some 120 students. There is a spot on site—and a need—to create an upper school and expand the capacity to 300.

The shot's timing was perfect. The night before, pros and amateurs alike gathered at the new Els Center of Excellence to tour its classrooms, walk its grounds (which even has a chip-and-putt golf course for the children) and watch presentations by Shanken, Liezl Els and several of the school's students.

“A dream come true,” said Shanken from the stage. “Hazel and I are so proud of what Ernie and Liezl and their team have accomplished.”

Said Dr. Marlene Sotelo, the Center's program director: “I've been working with people with autism for more than 20 years and I can honestly tell you there is no place like this in the world. Everything has been built with the needs of children with autism in mind. It's a beacon of hope.”

The school is grand and impressive, set on a 26-acre campus, but standing behind it is an open space reserved for the next phase of the project, the upper school for high-school age children.

Debate had ensued about when to begin the new project, but there just wasn't enough money. A board meeting was scheduled for 9 a.m. the next morning after the Pro-Am. Shanken was against the expansion and others were for it.

“The main topic of discussion was whether we are financially able to begin construction of the upper school, which would require an additional \$10 to \$12 million,” says Shanken. “My position was we should wait until we were on a stronger financial footing, but other board members, including Ernie and Liezl, were planning to vote yes. Once the hole-in-one occurred, I knew my position to defer was going to be tougher. Liezl looked me in the eyes and said, ‘Now you better say yes’ as she was gripped in emotion.”

At the morning meeting, there was more good news: Liezl told Shanken that Johann Rupert, the chairman of luxury goods company Richemont Group and a cofounder of the Foundation, had donated an additional \$1 million. That, plus a tea party held at the Els home that week raised the total for the week to \$3 million.

“At that point I had no position other than to say yes,” says Shanken. “Good karma has beaten me. I said, ‘OK, let's do it. Let's finish the dream of building our school for 300 beautiful autistic children.’”

As this issue was going to press, the earliest stages of construction were already beginning on the upper school. Shanken says his hopes are that the school will be open in 18 months.



Thomas Aiken
Three Years



Rich Beem
One Year



Daniel Berger
One Year

Els for Autism Pro Roster

This year's charity pro-am featured a star lineup of superb golfers. Many have participated multiple times in the tournament's history.



Keegan Bradley
Four Years



Greg Chalmers
Four Years



K.J. Choi
Four Years



Luke Donald
Six Years



Ernie Els
Eight Years



Tony Finau
One Year



Rickie Fowler
Three Years



Retief Goosen
Two Years



Brooks Koepka
Two Years



Rory McIlroy
Three Years



Jack Nicklaus
Six Years



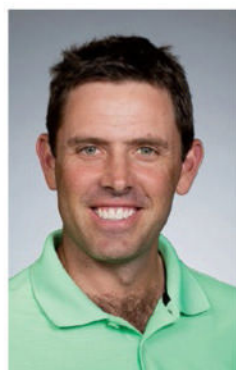
Louis Oosthuizen
Four Years



Nick Price
Three Years



Rory Sabbatini
Three Years



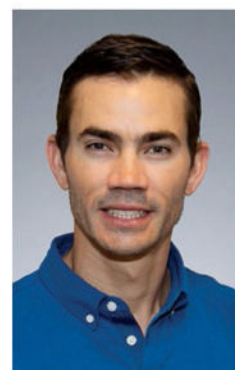
Charl Schwartzel
Five Years



Adam Scott
Six Years



Vijay Singh
Two Years



Camilo Villegas
Two Years

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—Jess Graber
Founder



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The Els Center of Excellence (top) opened its doors last summer. Rickie Fowler's ace paves the way for expansion. Above left, Ben and Liezl Els, Fowler, Marvin R. Shanken and Ernie Els after the shot. Above right, Shanken at the school the night before the Pro-Am, with three students from the Els Center.

"I have received innumerable e-mails, phone calls and texts from people who saw the publicity after it went viral," says Shanken. "It really was extraordinary."

The celebrity golfers who played in the Pro-Am included Els, golf legend Jack Nicklaus, Adam Scott (who won the Cadillac World Golf Championship the day before in nearby Trump National Doral), Fowler, Rory McIlroy, Louis Oosthuizen, Charl Schwartzel, Brooks Koepka, Nick Price, Thomas Aiken, Vijay Singh, K.J. Choi, Rich Beem, Luke Donald, Daniel Berger, Rory Sabbatini, Camilo Villegas, Retief Goosen, Tony Finau, Keegan Bradley and Greg Chalmers.

There were refreshing liquor and cigar stations spread throughout the course for people to enjoy. Campari, Bacardi, Ketel One, Jameson Irish Whisky and Moët Hennessy provided drinks for the thirsty golfers, and Alec Bradley, La Flor Dominicana, My Father Cigars and Padrón kept

everyone on the course puffing on premium smokes throughout the day.

The contest was won, with a score of 58, by the team headed by pro Camilo Villegas, playing with Marc Goodrich, David Dean and Kevin Roberts. Second place went to Rickie Fowler's team, who was joined by Steve Rust, Larry Schwartz and Jeff Ivey, with third place going to Louis Oosthuizen's team of Marvin R. Shanken, Rudolph W. Giuliani and Rush Limbaugh.

"This could not have been possible without the enormous support from day one from my friends in the wine and spirits and cigar industries," says Shanken. "Their support has been unwavering." ❖

To lend your support to the Els for Autism charity, visit <http://www.elsforautism.com>



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A full-page photograph of Alan Rubin, a man with glasses, wearing a grey pinstripe suit, a dark tie, and brown trousers. He is leaning against a light grey stone wall, holding a small object in his hands. The background is a textured wall with horizontal lines.

Alan Rubin
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LIVE TRUE



Rickie Fowler's smooth swing and sense of style has made him one of the most popular and exciting players on the PGA Tour.

WALTER IOOSS



FOWLER FOLLOWS THROUGH

ONCE TARRED AS OVERRATED,
RICKIE FOWLER THRUST HIMSELF
INTO THE BIG TIME LAST YEAR.
NOW HE SEEKS VICTORY IN A MAJOR
TO CINCH THE DEAL

BY JEFF WILLIAMS

When Rickie Fowler won The Players Championship in May of 2015, it answered a lot of questions about his ability to close the deal on the PGA Tour, to beat the best in the best of competition.

Not long before that thrilling triumph—he played the final four holes in five under par, then beat Sergio Garcia and Kevin Kisner in a playoff—a magazine survey of pros had voted Fowler the most overrated player. The Players victory was a major pushback against those perceptions and a major push forward in the career of a young man who has seriously come into his own.

In a season that saw Jordan Spieth win two major titles and Jason Day take a major to fulfill his promise, Rickie Fowler made his own stamp on the game. He followed up The Players with wins at the Scottish Open and the Deutsche Bank Classic, before starting 2016 with a win in Abu Dhabi.

And while you could say that The Players was his great point of departure, it is likely that a challenge from his coach, Butch Harmon, at the end of the 2014 campaign was the kick in Fowler's Puma pants that led to it. Fowler had finished in the top five in all four majors in 2014, but didn't win one, or any other tournament. Was he just a Puma mannequin, a fashion-forward ATM who cashed in on the game, but couldn't cash in the chips on Sunday?



Fowler is one of the most popular players on tour (top). With his coach, swing guru Butch Harmon (above) and posing with the 2015 Players Championship trophy (above right), which he won in a thrilling three-hole playoff after firing at the pin on the dangerous island green on 17.

"I used a little bit of tough love with him a couple years ago when he had those top-five finishes in all the majors, which was quite a feat," says Harmon. "He was really excited about that and at the end of the year when we were talking about what we needed to work on, I said, 'Yeah, that was good, but you didn't win anything.' And I said, 'Golf is about winning. Top fives don't really mean much, it's about winning golf tournaments, that's what your job is.' I think that startled him a little. I wanted him to realize that winning is the most important thing. I said once you win you are going to see how much more you feel good about yourself, how much more confidence you have and winning breeds winning and he's proved that now with how many tournaments he's won over the last nine months."

When Fowler won The Players, he was immediately asked about that players' poll.

"I laughed at the poll, but yeah, if there was any question, I think this right here answers anything you need to know," Fowler said at the time, responding in the quiet confident manner that reaches through all parts of his game and all parts of his life.

It's a very mature confidence in a very youthful player. Fowler is 27, looks like he's 20, and acts older and wiser. Call him Kid Konfident. His recent achievements, starting 2016 with a win, a fifth place at Kapalua, a second at the Phoenix Open and then his thrilling hole-in-one at Els for Autism that lit up social media (see page 64) portends well as he searches for that one defining victory, a major.

"It's having the belief and that confidence in knowing I can go out and get the job done, and having done so, winning four times in the last nine months, that belief has only continued to grow," Fowler says. "It's a fun time for me, it's a great time for golf. There are a lot of guys playing well and I'm just proud to be part of the mix."

In the absence of the imposing shadow of Tiger Woods, the mix last season was primarily the precocious Spieth, the dazzling Day and the magnificent Rory McIlroy. Now Fowler, though still without a major, has turned the Big Three into the Big Four.

"They are the three best, highest ranked players in the world, the three of them have played pretty amazing," says Fowler. "I want to be part of that crew. I think I mentioned last summer that I was a sneaky fourth. So we've got to take care of a major then maybe I can join the crew."

For Harmon, Fowler has already joined that club.

"If you look at the tournaments he won, it's been against quality fields, against the best players in the world," says Harmon. "It makes you believe in yourself. It gives you more confidence in all the work you've done because you've done it for the right reasons. He plays with so much more confidence. He knows he belongs in that group of elite ones at the top. At The Players we used the motivation of very underrated player and he goes out and wins. He goes to Abu Dhabi and everything is Rory and Jordan. Even though he's playing in that group, he's kind of flying under the radar as far as expectations. Then on Sunday everybody had to talk about him because he won the tournament."

There has always been a buzz around Fowler, and that first buzz came from an unlikely source—motocross. Back in his hometown of Murrieta, California, his father Rod introduced him to motorcycles at an early age and also introduced him to local motocross hero Jeremy McGrath, who was Fowler's Tiger Woods as a youth.

But Fowler's maternal grandfather had also introduced him to golf, and the two sports tugged at him until a motorcycle accident set him on a course for golf. Somewhat on his own but also under the tutelage of the late Barry McDonnell, he became a top high school player, then golfed for Oklahoma State, played on two Walker Cup teams and established himself as one of the world's top amateurs before turning pro in 2009.

He immediately made his mark with a series of high finishes and in 2010, at the age of 21 years and nine months, was a captain's pick for the Ryder Cup and the youngest U.S. player ever on that team.



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Fowler soared at The Players last year, where he carded an eagle and three birdies on the back nine on Sunday.

“I WAS WATCHING HIM ON THAT BACK NINE AT THE PLAYERS AND I THINK IT WAS SOME OF THE BEST GOLF I’VE EVER SEEN PLAYED...ALL THAT’S MISSING IS A MAJOR.” —ERNIE ELS

In September of that year, Fowler signed on with the apparel company Puma and his fashion statement—bold colors (orange on Sunday for Oklahoma State) and his big-brimmed caps—brought him a whole slew of attention. He became the Pied Piper of Puma, and on tournament weekends, children were following in his wake, attracted to his hip vibe, dressing like him, clamoring for autographs that he unfailingly signed. It touches him deeply.

“It puts things into perspective whether I’m having a good day or bad day out there,” says Fowler. “Seeing young fans or any fans wearing the Puma gear and showing support, it just makes me realize and appreciate what I get to do. It’s cool to be in a position where kids do look up to you and I have a chance to be a role model and potentially have a chance to have a positive influence on kids’ lives.”

Fowler’s lifestyle has been highly public. Along with fellow PGA Tour pros Bubba Watson, Hunter Mahan and Ben Crane, Fowler became part of a golf rap group, The Golf Boys. He flew in an F16, he continued to ride motorcycles, took delivery of expensive, sporty cars (Mercedes Benz, Porsche, a precious Mini Cooper), and dated a model (the relationship has since ended). Life was in the fast lane, even if his results on the course weren’t keeping pace. Nevertheless, he was devoted to getting better, to being something other than a flash in the pan.

Ernie Els was familiar with Fowler’s rise to the PGA Tour and introduced himself to him at Torrey Pines in 2010. There was something about Fowler that Els saw as important for the game. “I just welcomed him to the Tour,” says Els. “He was kind of quiet, kind of shy but you could see he had a lot going on. And he had that very special quality as a person. Then I was watching him on that back nine at The Players [in 2015] and I think it was

some of the best golf I’ve ever seen played. He’s really got a very high-quality game. All that’s missing is a major.”

It took a while for Fowler to become a PGA Tour winner, and he broke through at the Wells Fargo Championship in 2012. But that was it until The Players last year. Justin Rose knows what it’s like to have to carry around the burden of expectations as a young player. The Englishman was a standout amateur who struggled mightily when he first turned pro before finally climbing the ladder to the top of the game. He’s seen Fowler’s game mature and seen the aura that surrounds him.

“I’ve played enough with him to see the effect he has and definitely the young kids that come out dressed like him,” says Rose. “He’s very unique in his styling. I think he is his own man, which is fantastic. And he plays golf that way. He’s got that style and flair that are unique to him. I think his golf has grown. Butch has done a great job with him.”

What Harmon did was essentially overhaul Fowler’s swing, not an easy thing for a player to wrap his head around and not an easy thing to change when you’ve swung a certain way your whole life.

“Of all the people I’ve had success with at the upper level of the tour [think Tiger Woods], you can actually see the changes in Rickie’s swing quite a bit,” says Harmon. “It was a change in the takeaway where he used to get the club way outside of his hands until about waist high. Now the club is more in line with his feet in that position. I had to change his posture, he was too bent over. Change his takeaway. He would go back with the shaft outside his hands and the top of his swing he would have to reverse that. The club was way behind him and he would have to release really hard with his hands and when his timing was right he hit the ball pretty good, but if the timing got off he hit it all over the place.

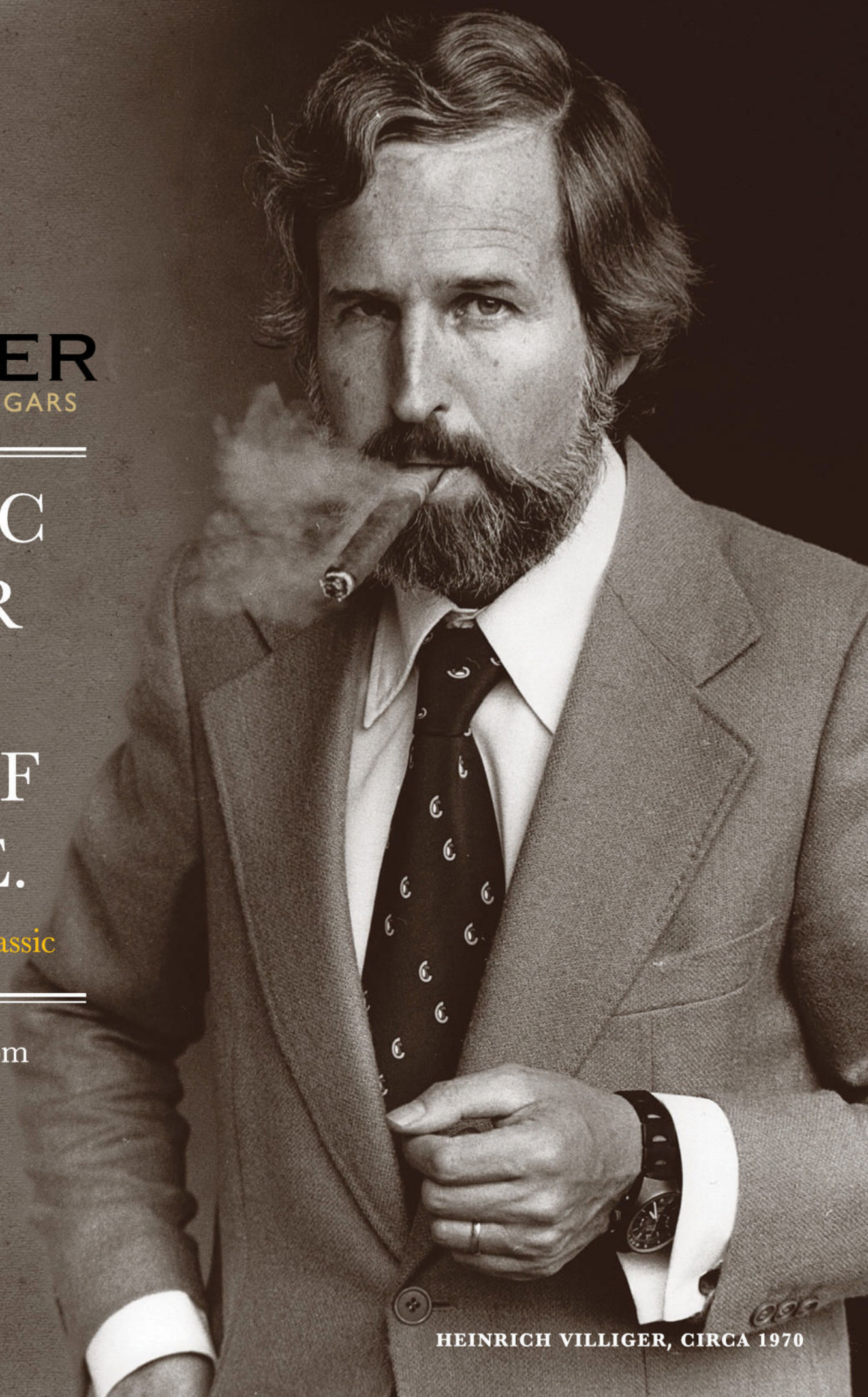


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Now, because he has the club coming down in the right position, more in front of him, his consistency has gotten so much better.”

Fowler took to Harmon’s teaching because he not only knew that Harmon had coached Woods to major wins, but he had some things in common with his late coach. “Both are old school,” says Fowler. “Barry passed away in his 70s, so they are from the same era. Part of it is just feeling comfortable and having someone like Butch when I’m out there. That’s what I did with Barry growing up and that’s what I’m doing with Butch right now.”

And Harmon sees room for improvement, the kind of improvement that can lead to a major victory.

“He can do better with his short irons. From about 150 yards in his proximity to the hole isn’t as good as it could be,” says Harmon. “We worked hard in the offseason on that and his wedge game has gotten a lot better. That was the big area I wanted him to improve on. His sand game he has done very well. He’s always been a good putter and he’s always chipped the ball pretty good, it’s just his actual wedge play wasn’t as good as it should be.”

Harmon sees Fowler’s motocross background as part of his competitive DNA.

“Absolutely. He’s fearless when he plays golf,” says Harmon. “If you watch him, things don’t bother him. Bad holes don’t bother him. Bad shots don’t bother him. He can shrug those off. I mean, he was in a sport that you can get killed doing and he loved every minute of it. He loved the challenge of it. He loved the adrenalin of it. He loves to compete and has always been a great competitor. That’s a huge asset, to be fearless. There isn’t any shot he doesn’t think he can hit. There isn’t any putt he doesn’t think he can make.”

Fowler’s longtime caddie Joe Skovron echoes that thought. “He likes that moment. He’s never really struggled in that moment. He gets that moment and he finishes,” Skovron says.

Putting in the work that Harmon required in order for the swing changes to become part of the routine was also in Fowler’s DNA. He didn’t come from money. His dad, Rod, was a trucker, his mother, Lynne, worked in the office of a steel company. His maternal grandfather, Yutaka Tanaka, was incarcerated in the internment of Japanese-Americans living on the West Coast during World War II. His maternal grandmother is of Navajo Indian descent.

“To see how hard they work is something I will never forget,” Fowler says. “And to know where my family came from, what they went through in the internment camps, to see what they believed as far as treating people . . . that will always stay with me.”

Certainly Harmon has seen this aspect of Fowler close up.

“His mom and dad are great,” says Harmon. “His mom and his sister travel with him a lot, handling his stuff. The family he came from, he’s very close to his grandma and grandpa—I know them, too, and they are wonderful people—the background and heritage of the whole family is great and that’s one of the reasons he’s such a nice kid.”

And a giving one. Through his Rickie Fowler Foundation he has

helped Japanese and Native American communities. He donated \$100,000 to the victims of the 2013 tornado in Moore, Oklahoma. He enjoys spending time with children. After he won in Abu Dhabi on a Sunday, he flew overnight to San Francisco, took a charter to San Diego and helped with a clinic for the local First Tee. Fowler has an endorsement relationship with Farmers Insurance, the sponsor of the San Diego tournament, and now appears in one of their commercials. “I said I would do it, I got some sleep on the plane, and it’s important that I follow through when I say I’m going to do something,” says Fowler.

Els has benefited from Fowler’s devotion to doing the right thing as the young golfer has played in the Els for Autism event, the cause so close to Els’ heart. “You know, these young kids who are successful, they



Fowler with four-time major winner Ernie Els (right), who welcomed the younger man to the PGA Tour. Fowler is a longtime supporter of Els’ charity, the Els for Autism Foundation.

get pulled in a lot of different directions,” says Els. “But Rickie has always made time for us, always asked what he could do to help. He’s got that special quality about him that very few people have. I have gotten to know his parents some and see where that comes from.”

From a wellspring of family devotion, Fowler worked his way into the everyday conversation about the best players in the game. Golf requires a certain backbone, a certain determination to overcome the inevitable bad days, and take yourself to levels that can be at once exhilarating and uncomfortable. The Rickie Fowler elevator has reached the penthouse level and he’s knocking on the door of a major. This doesn’t surprise Butch Harmon.

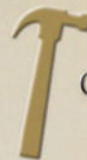
“Does he know who he is, does he have a lot of confidence?” Harmon asks. “Of course he does, but it’s not an arrogance, not a cockiness, it’s just a self belief.”

And as for a major victory, listen to Ernie Els: “He’s got the game. He’s got the attitude. He just needs that little bit of luck.” ♦

Jeff Williams is a contributing editor of CIGAR AFICIONADO.



Hand



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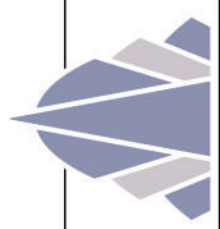
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CINEMA



A new type of high-end theater experience turns movie nights into luxurious evenings out

BY JACK BETTRIDGE
ILLUSTRATION BY GARY HOVLAND

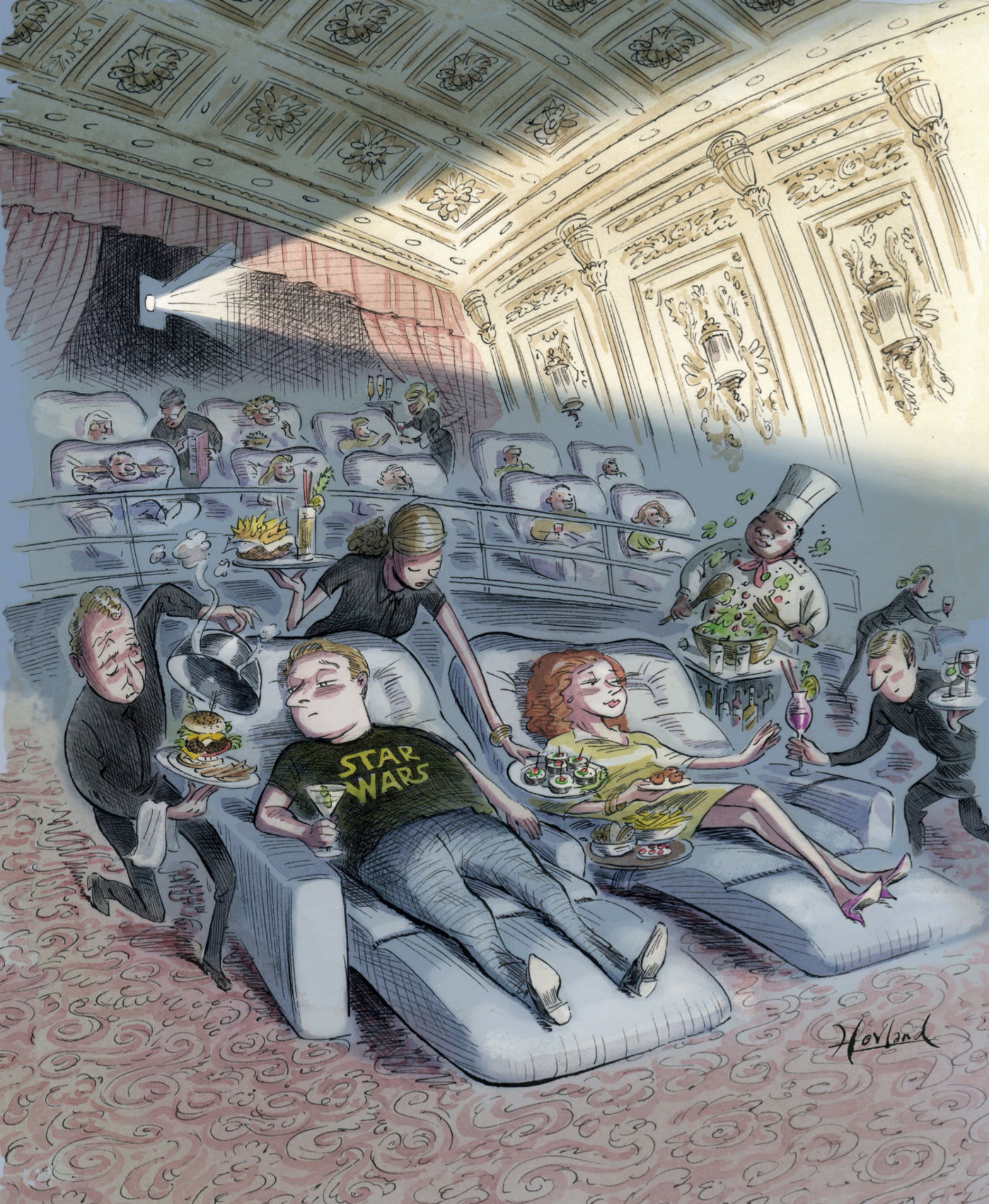
Paradise

YOU'RE ESCORTED TO your reserved seat: a motor-driven, cushy leather chair with a perch that is ready to support your weary legs. At the push of a button, the seat reclines far back, becoming more like a bed, as your attendant offers you a blanket before the movie begins. Then the food and drink start to arrive. You start with a Caesar salad, move onto a lobster and finish with a Tuxedo cream cheesecake. You pair this tasty feast with a classic cocktail, a glass of wine or a single-malt Scotch on the rocks.

You'd think you were in the first-class section of a jetliner, except that the film you're watching is a first-run feature and you're not viewing it on a tiny LCD screen mounted on the seat in front of you—not by a long shot. Your nearest neighbor is several feet

away and the screen before you towers dozens of feet high. This is the new face of movie playhouses: luxury, dine-in theaters like those of the worldwide exhibitor Cinépolis (just described) that take movie night to the concierge level. The accommodations are ultra luxurious, the highline food and beverage make the typical movie offering of chewy popcorn and a flat Coke seem like army rations and the level of service is incomparable to the candy-counter arrangements one must endure in the typical movie venue.

The age-old dinner-and-a-movie concept has become a one-stop proposition. At these high-end theaters, you drive your date to the movie, park once, and food, drink and entertainment are all packaged into one quite comfortable venue. What's more, waiting in line is minimized. You reserve seating in advance, ensuring



Horland



Leo Kulp, a Wall Street analyst for RBC Capital who specializes in the movie theater industry, expects such playhouses to increase by 25 to 35 percent in the next few years. The three biggest chains—Cinemark, AMC and Regal, which account for about half of the \$11 billion that the industry takes in annually—have announced plans to increase enhanced seating to between 25 and 40 percent of their screens. The next phase, Kulp predicts, will take it to another level. The phenomenon, which is grouped around wealthier markets, is unlikely to reach the same proportions as traditional theaters, Kulp adds. So far, it has been most prevalent in the suburbs, where driving to the movies is almost always part of the proposition and theaters are less likely to be conveniently located near fine dining. Such states as California, Florida, Georgia and Texas have been leaders.

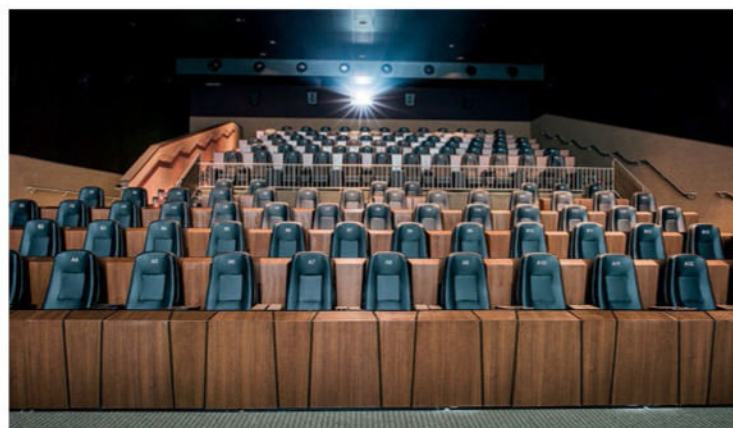
From a historical perspective, the trend is logical. Beginning with the advent of television and continuing through such options as cable, VHS, DVD and streaming, which bring movies home without the annoyance of advertising, theaters have been fighting a battle to put customers in seats. One of the first come-ons was the air-conditioned theater, but that convenience is now so pervasive at home that it has long ceased to be a selling point. Another approach has been souped-up viewing options, such as the many iterations of 3-D (which is also now available at home in video form) and giant IMAX screens. Next on the horizon is the 4DX experience, a technology that enhances the presentation with effects like seat motion, wind, rain, fog, lights, and



Well-crafted Manhattan cocktails and nouvelle cuisine are all part of the show at the new breed of luxury movie theaters, such as iPic (above).

that you and your date won't be separated, and eliminating the need to line up early in hopes of finding a good seat at a popular show. Once at your perch, there is no need to ever get up until the shows ends (warning: you may not want to even then). If you arrive early you can place an order for a full meal and enjoy a cocktail at your seat before the show begins. A tray table holds everything within easy reach so you can lie back and relax. If you feel like having your drink freshened or ordering a snack during the movie (yes, you can order popcorn, but we suggest something more genteel, such as a cheese plate, fire-grilled quesadillas or hummus and pita chips), press the call button and your server appears to fulfill your wishes. Discreet lighting at your seat makes it convenient to check the menu for anything you might have missed. There's no need to get up and no standing in line at a snack counter. And if anyone else gets up, you won't be disrupted. With only 50 to 70 seats in a theater, plenty of space is allotted for guests to walk in and out without other patrons having to stand up and block the views of those behind them.

The dine-in experience was pioneered in the United States a handful of years ago with independent theaters looking for ways to distinguish themselves. Now, it's on the rise with large chains getting into the act, and the level of luxury hitting new heights.



The Cinépolis theater in Jupiter, Florida, affords roomy seats with plenty of separation. Outside the screening room are a full bar and lounge area.



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The Commodore (top), of Portsmouth, Virginia, is fitted more like a restaurant than a theater. Enzian (bottom), in Maitland, Florida, has a lively bar area.

scents, something that has been used in amusement parks but has yet to make serious appearances in mainstream movie theaters. With the luxury theater experience movie screeners may have struck upon the next best thing—and with an important added benefit: the possible income from concessions has risen precipitously.

Even while local theaters bare the scorn of moviegoers outraged by ever-escalating admission prices, they've seen very little profit from the resulting inflation. The average price of a movie ticket in the United States is \$8.61 today, up almost 500 percent from \$1.76 40 years ago. Most of the cost of a movie ticket goes to pay for the rental of the movie, which means it goes back to the studio. Theaters depend on selling snacks at inflated prices for their livelihood. That's why a bucket of popcorn, which

you could make at home for pennies, costs so much when you go to the movies. Full meals and bar service are the ultimate concession booster.

Higher prices at the box office may be what is causing the erosion in movie going that has seen the average theater visit per capita in the U.S. drop from five times a year in 2012 to four times in 2014. However, sales from concessions have outstripped the losses in attendance. Kulp says that circuit theaters have been cautious about adding luxury because their sparse seating drives up ticket prices (sometimes close to \$30), but he adds, "At the end of the day, they are facing the challenge of trying to get people into the theater who will buy that high-margin popcorn." Popcorn that is locally grown or seasoned with pimentón (Spanish paprika) may be perfect in that scenario.

For Cinépolis USA, which is part of the Mexico-based concern that owns theaters throughout Latin America and India as well as in the United States, the luxury concept actually began offshore in 1999. "When they came to the U.S. in 2011, they decided to do the hyper-hyper version of what they had started," says April Mendoza, food & beverage and marketing director for Cinépolis, which has its own private label wines. "It just started by guests saying they want this elevated experience." The company plans to build five new locations this year, expanding to markets like Connecticut, Ohio and Virginia.

Cinépolis is by no means the only purveyor, nor are luxury theaters a cookie-cutter experience. Large chains like AMC and Regal have luxe theaters where the table-side fare is more basic, but you enjoy the calming atmosphere of a 21-and-over age limit. Food service varies from place to place. The iPic theater in Boca Raton, Florida, for instance, gets its meals catered by the nearby Tanzy restaurant and the renowned mixologist Adam Seger has designed its cocktail menu. Go to an independent food-and-a-flick theater and expect to find local specialties like the Coho salmon empanadas served at the Starlight Room in Port Townsend, Washington, or the muffaletta at the Theaters at Canal Place in New Orleans. The Alamo Drafthouse, in Austin, Texas, sometimes pairs its food offerings with the theme of the movie, like the Italian Wedding Soup it served at a revival of *Moonstruck*.

The possible layouts of a dinner-and-movie theater also vary—especially with independent theaters. You'll find banquettes and couches among the seating at Enzian, in Maitland, Florida. The Commodore, in Portsmouth, Virginia, has classic restaurant tables and chairs. If you get bored with the movie at Brewvies Cinema Pub in Salt Lake City, you can wander out to the lobby and shoot some pool.

With such a diversity of experience there are few drawbacks to this dinner-and-a-date scenario, except that you may fall asleep amidst all that comfort...and it's hard to make out with a tray table between you. ❖



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20

Pro poker's Wild West days are probably gone for good, but players and promoters are betting on new ways to profit in a changed, leaner environment

BY MICHAEL KAPLAN

ILLUSTRATION BY DIETER BRAUN

It's impossible to look at the Poker Central website, launched in 2015, without feeling a twinge of nostalgia. Its homepage is dominated by rectangular links to old poker-themed game shows like NBC's "Face The Ace," GSN's "High Stakes Poker" and "Poker After Dark," which once aired after "Last Call With Carson Daly." While Poker Central also offers current programming, its streaming content of reruns instantly evokes the glory days of card playing—say, 2007—when ordinary people marveled over gutsy shoves by Tom Dwan. Or the short-tempered outbursts from Phil Hellmuth. And how could one forget the lobbing of nasty-bombs courtesy of purple-haired David "Viffer" Peat.

But it's also impossible to forget that the era is gone, entangled in snarls of controversy and bitterness that followed the end of poker as we knew it for much of this millennium's first decade. That happened in 2011, after the U.S. government undeniably banned online poker. It didn't help that the online poker site Full Tilt was

shown to be insolvent, and, worse yet, that players looked like they would be stiffed for large sums of money. While the game still thrives in locations that range from the high-stakes card rooms of Las Vegas to friendly home games around the world to computer terminals of online operations (in jurisdictions where it remains legal), poker's best days seem to loom in the rearview mirror.

Erik Seidel is suitably positioned to offer an assessment. A backgammon player turned options trader, he got serious about poker after the stock market crashed in 1987. The following year Seidel finished second to Johnny Chan in the World Series of Poker Main Event. He's been crushing the game ever since. Lanky, loose-limbed and resourceful, Seidel found success in poker before there were million-dollar endorsement deals and opportunities for making money outside of winning it. Then, when online started to pop, he emerged as one of the original representatives of Full Tilt. It stood out in an industry that was great for a while; then everything went busto, with sites





In 2015, Poker Central hosted the Super High Roller Bowl. Brian Rast cleaned up by taking the first prize of \$7 million. Blue-chip company Amazon signed on as the major tournament sponsor.

disappearing, operators getting arrested and endorsement deals washing out. At this very moment, with ancillary opportunities all but incinerated, poker is pretty much back to where it used to be: largely a game where you need to play well if you want to earn a living.

Seidel has landed on his feet with more than \$7 million in tournament winnings over the last three years and he doesn't mind existing outside of the poker spotlight. "I don't think poker will ever be as big as it used to be," he says, sitting in the living room of his nice but not ostentatious home in a gated community on the suburban fringe of Las Vegas. "Unknown people used to get paid a lot of money to wear patches at final tables. You didn't even need to be a winning player. People got paid for playing online and received rake-back [they were refunded their share of the rake from each pot]. I don't know that the sites got much of a return on many of their players."

These days, Seidel estimates, there are maybe a few hundred people earning \$200,000 per year or more from poker. "Being a poker baller is a lot harder than it used to be," he assesses dryly. "If you think you will make a couple million dollars per year, steadily, from playing poker..." His voice trails off momentarily. "Well, it's not going to happen unless you have some very juicy spots."

If nothing else, Seidel is a realist. So he does catch my attention by capping all that pessimism with a dollop of hope: "In the future, though, I do think there will be more opportunities and more chances for poker players."

Clint Stinchcomb is betting heavily on that outcome. As the CEO of Poker Central, he has created a network—available via online and streaming apps—that he hopes will one day mimic the success of the Golf Channel. Express any skepticism to him about the broad appeal of poker right now, and he fires back with an anecdote from two summers ago: "I spent a week on a lake with my family,

and my 17-year-old son came running up to me. He wanted to know if I had seen the video of a hand between [high-stakes non-pros] Cary Katz and Connor Drinan. It was a million-dollar hand at the WSOP that generated more than nine million views online. My son was watching it on WorldStarHipHop and it was going viral. That was an 'ah-ha!' moment. There's crossover appeal on the digital side, with people gravitating to niche networks."

Then Stinchcomb busts out a few statistics. He says that there has been 15 percent in growth for land-based poker and that the top 10 poker players earn incomes in line with those of the top 10 pro golfers and tennis stars. "Chrysler is now in the poker space," he says. "So is Unilever, Monster and Budweiser." Poker Central is endearing itself to the poker community by putting on tournaments without charging the usual commissions that, according to one frequent participant, "usually adds up the money paid for second or third place." The network also shows sophistication through its deft leveraging of social media and the video platform Twitch.

Tellingly, for Poker Central's \$500,000 buy-in Super High Roller Bowl, which coincided with the 2015 World Series of Poker and paid out a first prize of around \$7 million to the highly respected pro Brian Rast, blue-chip company Amazon (the owner of Twitch) signed on as a major sponsor. Seidel sees that as potentially game changing. Stinchcomb sees it as being integral to his concept's success. The network can't count on poker-oriented businesses for total support. Considering that, he describes the first poker boom as having been "built on sand," with cash-flush online sites (which were never 100 percent legal) underwriting all of the TV shows. As for his prestigious sponsors, he says, "They make big statements about the firmness of the foundation. Amazon, for example, is moving more aggressively into the content space and they saw a connection with us that helps to enhance their media proposition."



Poker pro Erik Seidel was one of the first representatives of Full Tilt. Over the last three years, he's won more than \$7 million in tournament prizes.

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Stinchcomb looks forward to the day when he will have more than 50 percent original programming on Poker Central. That may include a wildly ambitious endeavor that's being touted as a poker sports league. Alexandre Dreyfus, who made money in 2012 by selling the B2B gaming platform for his online gambling site, ChiliGaming, to Bally Technologies, heads up the undertaking. Using some of the Chili money, he purchased Global Poker Index (a system for rating tournament poker players) from the defunct Epic Poker League (it, too, promised to radically change the way in which poker tournaments get played). The Index has proven to be a solid way of getting a handle on who are the best tournament players in the game. But Dreyfus plans on taking things a lot further.

He dubs his newest project Global Poker League (GPL) and it looks like it's being modeled after sports leagues such as the UFC. GPL owns 12 franchises, assigns a team-manager to each franchise and the managers draft players from a pool of top poker talent. Details on exactly how much players will be compensated and what they will be playing for remains under wraps. But Dreyfus expresses certainty about at least a few things: Poker matches will take place in arenas, there will be a shot-clock to keep action from lagging, and the table will be positioned underneath a sound-proof cube. This will enable the live audience to see hole cards with no apparent risk of information transmitting to players. Getting back to pay, Dreyfus hints that it will be somewhere between \$10,000 and \$100,000 per player on an hourly rate. Whatever the number is, he's managed to attract top players such as Vanessa Selbst and Phil Galfond. By the time this issue goes to print, Dreyfus says the league will be up and running.

All that said, his ideas sound interesting in terms of where poker is now and what can break it out from its perception of stasis. "Poker has become more modern," says Dreyfus. "The top players are under 30; they are super fit; they do sports and yoga; they are not from the old school. Inside our equivalent of the UFC octagon, they will stand up instead of sitting. That will force them to show more emotions. Matches will go for 45 or 90 minutes. There will be no hoodies or sunglasses. Players will have to control their tells and our cameras will capture the full range of emotions."

Like a lot of people in the business of poker, Dreyfus acknowledges that a second poker boom is closely tied to the legalization of online

"Poker has become more modern," says Dreyfus. "The top players are under 30; they are super fit; they do sports and yoga; they are not from the old school."

poker. He claims that 2017 is a likely target date for online to be legislated in New York and Pennsylvania. Then, he says, there are short odds for a compact being signed that will align New York, New Jersey and Pennsylvania. If players from those three states are in the same pool, it will begin creating the kind of buzz and liquidity that made the aughts so great for playing online. "Besides the legalization of online poker, we need to have sites putting in marketing dollars," he says, maintaining that New Jersey's recent approval of Poker Stars for online will bring momentum to that necessity. "We need to build something new, something that will engage the audience."



Entrepreneur Alexandre Dreyfus says his Global Poker is modeled after sports leagues like the UFC.

Inside the Amazon Ballroom of Rio All-Suites Hotel & Casino in Las Vegas this past summer, World Series of Poker tables sit empty and flashing signage around the so-called TV table is static. Executive director Ty Stewart proffers a couple of high-end cigars and looks over his domain that is deserted only because players in the midst of the Main Event are on break. Before running the World Series, Stewart served as a marketing executive for the NFL. He may have taken a risk leaving the established sports league for an up-and-comer like poker. But he has no regrets. Even so, Stewart knows that the game has reached a plateau where it will remain until something big happens.

He acknowledges that broad legalization of online poker will go a long way—"California is a bigger poker market than France"—but also thinks the really big thing is something that remains out of his control. He pretty much concurs with Dreyfus and Stinchcomb in believing that the real accelerant will be a new posse of poker stars. No longer hot-shot iconoclasts, the Hellmuths and Negreanus and Iveys of this world have grown into being the game's grand old men. In their wake, nobody has truly stepped up to replace them. Stewart knows who he wants. "We need fresh faces," he says. "A woman winning the Main Event one of these years would be a wake-up call to the market. Right now women comprise only six-percent [of the World Series of Poker market]. It would be huge for a girl to win."

Despite the fact that 10 minutes from now, the Amazon will be filled with talented players angling for a first prize of \$8 million, even Stewart is not immune to a touch of misty-eyed nostalgia as he looks across the



Andrew Robl is one of poker's younger practitioners who thrives in the world's largest live poker showdowns.

room, taking in giant flags with portraits of previous WSOP champs. He gestures toward a familiar face. “Chris Moneymaker got through to the pop culture and he changed poker in 2003,” says Stewart. “We’re still waiting for the next Chris Moneymaker.”

Then there are those who love the game and are too busy capitalizing on its potential riches to sit around worrying over who will be poker’s next embodiment of salvation. Andrew Robl—singled out in a 2008 article in this magazine about poker’s top young practitioners—used to make half of his living from lucrative online games. Now he does extremely well by staying competitive in the world’s largest live poker showdowns. Whatever happens with poker, as far as he’s concerned, the impact on players at his level will be limited. Besides, he’s never been one to pine for the past or hope for a miracle down the line.

Over dinner at Michael Mina’s recently opened Bardot, an elegant bistro inside Aria, where he just busted out of a high-stakes poker tournament, Robl says, “The secret to life is adaptability. Black Friday [the day in 2011 when the government shut down online poker in America] was the best thing that ever happened to me in my career. I went to Macau and other parts of the world to find big games. I made more money than ever before due to Black Friday. Other people got really angry and wondered how the government and Full Tilt could screw them over.

“I think, in any situation, there are good solutions that can make your situation better. I looked for other poker games I could play in and make money with. Since I started playing poker, every year has been more profitable than the previous one. I didn’t expect the demise of online to change that.”

While Robl likes the advent of Poker Central—playing in rake-free tournaments can’t be beat—and he would welcome the full legalization

of online poker in America, he believes that the glory of playing on the Internet will be short-lived. “In the next 10 years,” he says, “there will be computers playing better than any humans. At that point, nobody will play high-stakes poker online.”

Fortunately for him, the live game, played for nosebleed stakes among seasoned pros and action-hungry amateurs who can afford it, will not be going anywhere—barring a collapse of the world economy or some other unexpected disaster. He knows all too well that easy money ensnared from online sponsorships and cagey deal-making can be short-lived at best and illusory at worst. Those who think otherwise ought to have a chat with Brian Rast. Nobody to feel sorry for, Rast netted nearly \$9 million in tournament wins during 2015 while largely operating as a high-stakes cash player. But in the dog days of the poker boom, Rast—along with a cadre of young pros including Robl and Antonio Esfandiari—got stung by the allure of splashy Victory Poker, a site that never quite took off.

Victory Poker had young, suddenly wealthy players funding it, but the site died as a victim of timing. It was supposedly poised to accelerate just as online poker got banned in the U.S. However, there are also allegations of money being spent frivolously on big parties and lavish trips. “Victory was a total disaster,” says Rast, sipping bottled water at the bar near Aria’s poker room. “Management had a go-big strategy and we [young pros helping to fund the site] all lost money. It was a negative. I had a piece and literally got no money out of it. Done.”

Fortunately for Rast, he also happens to be one of the canniest, most talented players in the world. He knows how to sublimate his ego and work hard on his game. It’s gotten him way beyond needing to hope for a sponsorship lifeline, and allows him to thrive in the current environment. “Poker has gotten tougher,” he continues. “If you want to do well [with there being few options outside of playing] you need to keep improving your game. Andrew and Antonio are two of my best friends and they are both doing better than ever.”

Esfandiari, who famously finished first in the debut Big One for One Drop million-dollar buy-in tournament in 2012, has a big personality, good looks and a knack for instinctively playing up his gambling. It’s part of what led Clint Stinchcomb to make him a spokesman for Poker Central. That same charisma helps Esfandiari to finesse his way into the kinds of “juicy spots” that Seidel references as being integral for poker-success these days.

As much as he enjoys playing the game, Esfandiari is a big proponent of finding a better way. If things go as hoped, he will most likely be among a fortunate minority who can cash-in away from the table, even if the new poker environment proves to be less frothy than the old one. “It all has to do with how much people like watching you on television,” says Esfandiari, endeavoring to quantify what it takes to be a successful poker celebrity. “I’ve always had a good time and enjoyed making people laugh. Other players look so serious at the table. Who wants to follow them? Me, I’m the same on TV and off. When you leave, I’ll go shoot the shit with the concierge of my apartment building. Most younger pros take poker too seriously. I think they’re ruining the game. They take a minute for each decision and lock eyes with opponents. They ruin themselves [for other opportunities] without realizing it.”

Asked how good those opportunities may be, Esfandiari smiles and replies, “My opinion is that when you can make money in your sleep it makes a big difference in your life.” ♦

Michael Kaplan is a CIGAR AFICIONADO contributing editor.



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cigars

102 BLIND TASTING

Our panel of cigar-smoking editors assesses the quality of 80 cigars from around the world in a blind taste test, including a trio of smokes that scored 93 points.

120 VINTAGE TASTING

We smoked a Punch Punch that's been sitting in a 50-count cedar cabinet for 25 years. At 98 points, it's evolved into a near-perfect, classic smoke.

122 JOSÉ ORLANDO PADRÓN TURNS 90

José Orlando Padrón has spent nine decades on this earth, most of which have been dedicated to perfecting his cigars. Executive editor David Savona sat down with Padrón for an enlightening interview.

128 THE COMPELLING STORY OF RONALD BALSON

The litigator with a knack for narration has turned to writing, and now he has three books under his belt, including *Once We Were Brothers*.

137 HABANOS FESTIVAL

Cuba's 18th Habanos Festival unveiled many new cigars to come, but the most buzz surrounded Cohiba, which celebrates its 50th anniversary.

141 SANTIAGO'S CIGAR CELEBRATION

Senior editor Gregory Mottola reports from the ProCigar Festival in the Dominican Republic.

JEFF HARRIS

churchills

A quintessential Cuban Churchill lived up to its reputation in this tasting, as the Cohiba Esplendido scored 92 points—the highest of the entire category. It's part of the Linea Clasica line, essentially the core lineup of Cohibas, and was released in 1989 when the brand was still relatively new to the world market. Decades later, the venerable cigar size still impresses. Note the new, updated holographic band. The Montecristo Epic Churchill from the Dominican Republic scored 91 points. Epic is one of the stronger versions of this heritage brand and was made with a modern blend based around an Ecuadoran wrapper and hearty Nicaraguan tobacco. Oliva's combination of Nicaraguan tobacco and Connecticut broadleaf made for a bargain-priced maduro that scored 90 points.



CUBA

COHIBA ESPLENDIDO

RING GAUGE: 47 LENGTH: 7"
FILLER: CUBA
BINDER: CUBA
WRAPPER: CUBA
BOX DATE: JULY 2015

Structured and complex, this cigar leaves clear impressions of nuts and graham cracker atop a hearty base of coffee bean. The maple-and-coffee finish is long and rich.
U.S.: N/A U.K.: £40.20

92



DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

MONTECRISTO EPIC CHURCHILL

RING GAUGE: 56 LENGTH: 7"
FILLER: DOM. REP., NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

There's a strong savory core to this large cigar. Bold notes of leather, minerals and wheat are balanced by sweet, floral aspects and a touch of spice.
U.S.: \$15.94 U.K.: N/A

91



NICARAGUA

OLIVA SERIE G MADURO CHURCHILL

RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 7"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: U.S.A./CONN. BROADLEAF

A squarely pressed Churchill enrobed in a dark, matte wrapper. It shows a toasty nuttiness with hints of vanilla and anise. The finish is long and pleasing.
U.S.: \$6.05 U.K.: N/A

90



HONDURAS

HAMMER + SICKLE HERMITAGE NO. 1 CHURCHILL

RING GAUGE: 56 LENGTH: 7"
FILLER: HONDURAS, GERMANY
BINDER: HONDURAS
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

Nearly perfect in appearance, this large, softly pressed cigar smokes very evenly. Its chewy notes of cedar, spice and wood lead to an herbal finish.
U.S.: \$9.25 U.K.: N/A

89



NICARAGUA

LA AROMA DE CUBA EDICION ESPECIAL NO. 4

RING GAUGE: 49 LENGTH: 7"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

Covered in an attractive colorado wrapper, this large Churchill draws and burns evenly. It's a cedary, leathery smoke with a wheat-and-honey sweetness and a charry finish.
U.S.: \$7.75 U.K.: N/A

89

**NICARAGUA**

RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 7"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

SAN CRISTOBAL REVELATION TRIUMPH

A tall, box-pressed cigar with some soft spots and an easy draw. Its rich pistachio quality underscores notes of spice and wood before leaving a nutty aftertaste.

U.S.: \$8.50 U.K.: N/A

89

**NICARAGUA**

RING GAUGE: 56 LENGTH: 6 3/4"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: HONDURAS
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

SUBLIMES GRANDE

Wrapped in a dark and enticing cover leaf, this cigar draws evenly and holds a strong ash. Salty, bready notes are redolent of a hot pretzel. The finish carries notes of wood and sassafras.

U.S.: \$8.50 U.K.: N/A

89

**DOMINICAN REPUBLIC**

RING GAUGE: 48 LENGTH: 6 3/4"
FILLER: DOM. REP.
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

DAVIDOFF MILLENNIUM BLEND SERIES CHURCHILL

Dark and oily with some prominent veins, this cigar has a firm draw. Initial puffs are damp and earthy with hints of peppercorns. A toffee sweetness is offset by a musty note.

U.S.: \$28.60 U.K.: N/A

87

**DOMINICAN REPUBLIC**

RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 7"
FILLER: DOM. REP.
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: DOM. REP.

PROJECT 805 CHURCHILL

Woody and earthy, this dark, oily cigar burns unevenly, forming a loose ash. Touches of cedar and bittersweet chocolate also come through before the charry finish.

U.S.: \$7.50 U.K.: N/A

87

**HONDURAS**

RING GAUGE: 54 LENGTH: 7"
FILLER: HONDURAS, NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

ROMEO Y JULIETA RESERVE CHURCHILL

The savory, earthy profile of this large cigar ranges from leather, cumin and saffron to wood and white pepper, though a slightly sour finish offset the score.

U.S.: \$6.60 U.K.: N/A

87

**DOMINICAN REPUBLIC**

RING GAUGE: 49 LENGTH: 7"
FILLER: DOM. REP., NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

E.P. CARRILLO NEW WAVE CONNECTICUT GRAN VIA

A tan, mild to medium-bodied Churchill whose hay-like smoke picks up a nuttiness and a long minty finish.

U.S.: \$7.50 U.K.: N/A

86

**HONDURAS**

RING GAUGE: 48 LENGTH: 6 3/4"
FILLER: HONDURAS, DOM. REP.,
NICARAGUA
BINDER: U.S.A./CONN. BROADLEAF
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

PUNCH DOUBLE CORONA EMS

The ample, open draw of this big cigar delivers a gritty, earthy smoke with a tangy, coppery finish and a touch of licorice.

U.S.: \$6.29 U.K.: N/A

86

Somewhat of an encrypted cipher, the Illusione mk stands for “mind kontrol,” and it scored an impressive 92 points. According to brand owner Dion Giolito, the corona size serves as the best blending template for creating a cigar. If one can make a good corona, one can “kontrol” the market. Those who don’t share his capricious affinity for hidden messages can focus on the fact that the mk is full of fantastic Nicaraguan tobacco. The Padrón 1964 Anniversary Series Corona scored 91 points. It’s an unpopular size rolled in a very popular line. With the current market so focused on thick cigars, many are unaware that Padrón makes a 1964 Anniversary corona at all.



NICARAGUA

RING GAUGE: 42 LENGTH: 5 1/8"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

ILLUSIONE MK

This spicy, woody little corona develops a profound coffee bean character before segueing into a caramel and toffee sweetness. A complex smoke.
U.S.: \$7.95 U.K.: N/A

92



NICARAGUA

RING GAUGE: 42 LENGTH: 6"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

PADRÓN 1964 ANNIVERSARY SERIES CORONA

A strong, earthy combination of chocolate and charcoal punctuated by meaty leathery notes and a honey blossom finish. The draw is superb.
U.S.: \$10.20 U.K.: N/A

91



CUBA

RING GAUGE: 42 LENGTH: 5 1/4"
FILLER: CUBA
BINDER: CUBA
WRAPPER: CUBA
BOX DATE: MARCH 2015

H. UPMANN CORONA MAJOR (TUBO)

Each puff of this nutty little corona combines notes of semisweet chocolate with orange peel and savory wood. A medium-bodied smoke.
U.S.: N/A U.K.: £14.11

90



DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

RING GAUGE: 44 LENGTH: 5 1/2"
FILLER: DOM. REP., NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

MONTECRISTO WHITE MONTECRISTO COURT

Oils are seeping through the wrapper of this tan, lightly hued cigar. Initial grassiness dissipates to show richer notes of earth, toast and cinnamon.
U.S.: \$9.85 U.K.: N/A

89



NICARAGUA

RING GAUGE: 43 LENGTH: 6"
FILLER: COSTA RICA, NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

NAT SHERMAN PANAMERICANA CERVANTES

A solidly rolled corona with bit of a firm draw that opens up. It’s a brawny, earthy smoke with minerals, some citrus acidity and a leathery finish.
U.S.: \$9.25 U.K.: N/A

89



DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

RING GAUGE: 45 LENGTH: 5 1/4"
FILLER: DOM. REP.
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: U.S.A./CONN. BROADLEAF

ARTURO FUENTE CUBAN CORONA MADURO

Rustic in appearance, this cigar is covered in a rough, gnarly wrapper, but offers a pleasant, medium-bodied smoke redolent of dried fruit, vanilla bean and toast.
U.S.: \$5.65 U.K.: N/A

88

**HONDURAS**

RING GAUGE: 44 LENGTH: 5 1/2"
FILLER: HONDURAS, DOM. REP.
BINDER: HONDURAS
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

CAMACHO CONNECTICUT CORONA

This lightly hued cigar imparts a fairly mild, woody smoke brightened by touches of lemon and vanilla bean, though the finish is a bit short.
U.S.: \$7.25 U.K.: N/A

88**CUBA**

RING GAUGE: 40 LENGTH: 5 1/2"
FILLER: CUBA
BINDER: CUBA
WRAPPER: CUBA
BOX DATE: MAY 2015

ROMEO Y JULIETA ROMEO NO. 1 (TUBO)

Rumpled and veiny with an uneven cap, this corona combines earthy, caramel notes with hints of cinnamon and nuts before a citrus finish. Tastier than it looks.
U.S.: N/A U.K.: £16.29

88**CUBA**

RING GAUGE: 44 LENGTH: 5 1/4"
FILLER: CUBA
BINDER: CUBA
WRAPPER: CUBA
BOX DATE: JULY 2015

TRINIDAD COLONIALES

This pigtailed corona has a notably soft head, but offers lots of smoke on the draw. Floral notes lead to impressions of cashews and toasted vanilla, but the finish is a bit acidic.
U.S.: N/A U.K.: £16.04

88**HONDURAS**

RING GAUGE: 40 LENGTH: 6"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: HONDURAS
WRAPPER: HONDURAS

LA PALINA EL DIARIO KB II

Slim and dark, this oily cigar has a notably uneven burn. It's an earthy, salty cigar with touches of cocoa and a muddled finish.
U.S.: \$8.25 U.K.: N/A

87**DOMINICAN REPUBLIC**

RING GAUGE: 43 LENGTH: 5 5/8"
FILLER: DOM. REP.
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

DAVIDOFF GRAND CRU NO. 2

Slightly grayish in color, this woody smoke shows some notes of baking spice and a touch of mustiness before the herbal finish.
U.S.: \$16.00 U.K.: N/A

86**DOMINICAN REPUBLIC**

RING GAUGE: 42 LENGTH: 5 3/4"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

VEGAFINA NICARAGUA CORONA

A discolored and veiny corona covered in glue spots. It draws and burns evenly, imparting some straw-and-hay notes followed by touches of nougat and vanilla, though the finish is a bit harsh.
U.S.: \$5.50 U.K.: N/A

86**HONDURAS**

RING GAUGE: 44 LENGTH: 5 1/2"
FILLER: NICARAGUA, DOM. REP.
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

H. UPMANN LEGACY CORONA

Though the draw is ample and even, the smoke is tart and earthy with a heavy mineral component and a bitter coffee finish.
U.S.: \$5.55 U.K.: N/A

84**DOMINICAN REPUBLIC**

RING GAUGE: 43 LENGTH: 5 1/2"
FILLER: DOM. REP., NICARAGUA
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: U.S.A./CONN. BROADLEAF

LA AURORA 107 MADURO CORONA

The dark wrapper of this small cigar is covered in heavy veins. An easy draw delivers earthy smoke that combines with mineral notes and tart wood before an herbal finish.
U.S.: \$6.65 U.K.: N/A

84

corona gordas

The Norteño Robusto Grande is dark, flatly pressed and scored 93 points, one of the highest-rated cigars of the entire issue. It's pressed to the point that it almost resembles a plank, but this has only resulted in a superb draw that offers a dense, chewy smoke full of rich character. The cigar was created by Willy Herrera, who holds the title of master blender at Drew Estate. Being from Miami, Herrera is a northerner in Nicaragua, so he named the brand "norteño" which translates to northerner in Spanish. This category of corona gordas, usually the most crowded in CIGAR AFICIONADO tastings, had no shortage of high scores. Four cigars scored 91 points and one scored 90.



NICARAGUA

RING GAUGE: 54 LENGTH: 5 1/2"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: HONDURAS
WRAPPER: MEXICO

NORTEÑO ROBUSTO GRANDE

Large and pressed, this rectangular cigar has a lush, opulent draw that leaves rich impressions of milk chocolate, cocoa bean and nougat on the palate. Balanced and delicious.
U.S.: \$12.00 U.K.: N/A

93



NICARAGUA

RING GAUGE: 46 LENGTH: 6 1/4"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

BRICK HOUSE CORONA LARGA

Big notes of leather and earth are balanced by a vanilla and nougat-like sweetness. This long corona gorda has a toothy wrapper and burns evenly throughout.
U.S.: \$5.55 U.K.: N/A

91



NICARAGUA

RING GAUGE: 56 LENGTH: 6"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

EL GÜEGÜENSE TORO HUACO

A fat, finely constructed cigar that offers heavy notes of wood and cinnamon. The smoke becomes sweeter, showing elements of chocolate and vanilla bean.
U.S.: \$12.00 U.K.: N/A

91



NICARAGUA

RING GAUGE: 48 LENGTH: 6 1/2"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: MEXICO

ESPINOSA ESPECIAL NO. 1

A cigar with an oily, attractive reddish-brown wrapper. It shows a sweet and earthy combination of coffee bean and cocoa nibs, underscored by notes of vanilla bean.
U.S.: \$8.75 U.K.: N/A

91



DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

RING GAUGE: 54 LENGTH: 6"
FILLER: DOM. REP., NICARAGUA
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: U.S.A./CONN. BROADLEAF

HENRY CLAY STALK CUT TORO

Enrobed in an alluringly oily wrapper, this cigar is rolled with an uncut foot and flat head. Toasty, cedary notes are matched by a rich almond and marzipan finish.
U.S.: \$8.50 U.K.: N/A

91



DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 6"
FILLER: ECUADOR
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: DOM. REP.

CASA CUBA DOBLE SEIS

Minty and woody, this corona gorda becomes toasty in character with notes of chocolate that lead to a pleasing finish of herbs and spices.
U.S.: \$12.50 U.K.: N/A

90



HONDURAS

RING GAUGE: 56 LENGTH: 6 1/2"
FILLER: HONDURAS, NICARAGUA
BINDER: HONDURAS, NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: HONDURAS

ALEC BRADLEY FINE & RARE JRS 10=(86)

A fat corona gorda with an even burn and firm draw. Notes of earth, salted almonds and smoked hickory lead to a slightly spicy finish.
U.S.: \$18.50 U.K.: N/A

89



CUBA

RING GAUGE: 46 LENGTH: 5 5/8"
FILLER: CUBA
BINDER: CUBA
WRAPPER: CUBA
BOX DATE: DECEMBER 2014

HOYO DE MONTERREY EPICURE NO. 1

Softly pressed with a three-seam cap, this is a primarily floral cigar with elements of gingersnap and walnut. The toasty finish also carries touches of grass and wood.
U.S.: N/A U.K.: £18.80

89



NICARAGUA

RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 6"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

JOYA RED TORO

The head of this toro is topped with a four-seam cap. It's a very woody cigar defined by a big oaky quality and cedary finish. Sweet touches of almonds are also present.
U.S.: \$7.05 U.K.: N/A

89



HONDURAS

RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 6"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: MEXICO

PADILLA SAN ANDRÉS TORO

This brawny, earthy cigar is full of leather notes that leave a charred wood aftertaste. A bold smoke that could use a bit of sweetness.
U.S.: \$6.50 U.K.: N/A

89



HONDURAS

RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 6"
FILLER: NICARAGUA, HONDURAS
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

HERITAGE BY DUNHILL TORO

Heavy nutty notes of pistachio and almonds are interwoven with chocolate impressions, but this dark, oily cigar becomes cedary with a briny, olive-like finish. Some inconsistency was noted.
U.S.: \$11.25 U.K.: N/A

88



NICARAGUA

RING GAUGE: 46 LENGTH: 6 1/2"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: MEXICO

JERICHO HILL LBV

Long and box pressed with a dark, alluring wrapper. Its creamy smoke imparts touches of nougat, vanilla bean and licorice before a less intense, grassy finish.
U.S.: \$8.95 U.K.: N/A

88



HONDURAS

RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 6"
FILLER: NICARAGUA, HONDURAS
BINDER: HONDURAS
WRAPPER: HONDURAS

ROCKY PATEL TWENTIETH ANNIVERSARY TORO

Crafted with well-tapered shoulders, this dark, box-pressed cigar draws and burns perfectly. First puffs are peppery and woody but become overwhelmingly chappy.
U.S.: \$11.45 U.K.: N/A

87



NICARAGUA

RING GAUGE: 58 LENGTH: 5 1/2"
FILLER: DOM. REP., HONDURAS, NICARAGUA
BINDER: BRAZIL
WRAPPER: U.S.A./CONN. HABANO

CAO FLATHEAD STEEL HORSE APEHANGER

Gleaming with oils, this big cigar is topped with an unusually flat head. It leaves earthy, oily impressions with a touch of spice and an iodine aftertaste.
U.S.: \$8.99 U.K.: N/A

86

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 **kindle**

The MBombay Classic is a small, relatively new brand rolled in Costa Rica and owned by Mel Shah. Its shapely Perfecto scored 92 points. The large band is sure to get the attention of smokers perusing the shelves of their local shops—it looks like it's rolled in a Persian carpet. This is a band that must be removed before smoking, unless of course the enthusiast is only interested in smoking a third of the cigar. Nearly black in appearance, the Flores y Rodriguez Connecticut Valley Reserve Belicoso scored 91 points and is named for partners Abe Flores and Juan Rodriguez, who co-own the PDR Cigars factory in the Dominican Republic. It's the first broadleaf cigar to come out of PDR Cigars with the Flores name and it teems with flavor. Each Belicoso comes packaged in beautifully finished maple boxes.



COSTA RICA

RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 5 1/2"
FILLER: HONDURAS, NICARAGUA,
PERU, DOM. REP.
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

MBOMBAY CLASSIC PERFECTO

This well-made figurado has a lush draw and even burn. It imparts floral and creamy intonations, complemented by notes of almond and rich woods.

U.S.: \$11.00 U.K.: N/A

92



DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

RING GAUGE: 54 LENGTH: 5 1/2"
FILLER: DOM. REP., NICARAGUA
BINDER: ECUADOR, NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: U.S.A./CONN. BROADLEAF

FLORES Y RODRIGUEZ CONNECTICUT VALLEY RESERVE BELICOSO

Each puff of this dark torpedo imparts a semisweet chocolate and raw cocoa character balanced by dried fruit notes and an earthy, leathery finish.

U.S.: \$17.00 U.K.: N/A

91



DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 6"
FILLER: DOM. REP.
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: DOM. REP.

ASHTON ESTATE SUN GROWN 22-YEAR SALUTE

Oily and dark, this softly pressed torpedo has an earthy, cocoa quality balanced by sweet notes of graham cracker and honey. A spicy ginger note emerges on the finish.

U.S.: \$20.00 U.K.: N/A

90



DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

RING GAUGE: 54 LENGTH: 6 1/4"
FILLER: DOM. REP., NICARAGUA
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: CAMEROON

LA FLOR DOMINICANA CAMEROON CABINET TORPEDO

A bready, nutty cigar whose creamy smoke is also redolent of nougat and almonds. The sweet-and-sour finish picks up notes of spicy cinnamon.

U.S.: \$11.20 U.K.: N/A

90



NICARAGUA

RING GAUGE: 58 LENGTH: 7 1/2"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: BRAZIL, MEXICO
WRAPPER: MEXICO

TABAQUERO HAMLET PAREDES SALOMON

This large and imposing Salomon has intricate curves. The first puffs offer copious amounts of earthy, chappy smoke with elements of licorice and fruit.

U.S.: \$9.80 U.K.: N/A

90



NICARAGUA

RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 5 1/2"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

FLOR DE LAS ANTILLAS BELICOSO

Softly box pressed with a strikingly even burn. There's a touch of underlying acidity to this spicy, leathery smoke, which takes on an espresso note before the salty finish.
U.S.: \$7.30 U.K.: N/A

89



NICARAGUA

RING GAUGE: 58 LENGTH: 6"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

GURKHA CELLAR RESERVE PLATINUM HEDONISM

This fat, double-tapered perfecto is topped with a pigtail cap and smokes evenly, delivering salty, earthy notes and a touch of spice before a finish heavy with minerals.
U.S.: \$10.00 U.K.: N/A

89



NICARAGUA

RING GAUGE: 54 LENGTH: 5"
FILLER: HONDURAS, NICARAGUA
BINDER: BRAZIL
WRAPPER: U.S.A./CONN. HABANO

LIGA PRIVADA T52 BELICOSO

Rolled with a blunted belicoso tip, this dark cigar is packed solid with tobacco, but draws well, imparting a charry, woody smoke balanced by touches of dried fruit and black pepper.
U.S.: \$15.50 U.K.: N/A

89



NICARAGUA

RING GAUGE: 58 LENGTH: 6"
FILLER: NICARAGUA, DOM. REP.,
U.S.A./PENN. BROADLEAF
BINDER: ECUADOR
WRAPPER: CAMEROON

LECCIA TOBACCO WHITE PERFECTO

This classic, double-tapered perfecto starts with big notes of leather and pepper but softens as it smokes, showing a finish redolent of black tea and cinnamon.
U.S.: \$9.00 U.K.: N/A

88



U.S.A.

RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 6 1/8"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

TATUAJE CABINET UNICO

A beautiful torpedo enrobed in a reddish-brown wrapper with few visible veins. It's strong and spicy with touches of pepper, earth and a woody note of tree bark that lingers on the finish.
U.S.: \$11.50 U.K.: N/A

88



CUBA

RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 5 1/2"
FILLER: CUBA
BINDER: CUBA
WRAPPER: CUBA
BOX DATE: MARCH 2015

SAN CRISTOBAL DE LA HABANA LA PUNTA

Overly floral, almost to the point of perfumey, this belicoso has a slight vanilla quality as well. The finish is notably dry.
U.S.: N/A U.K.: £19.23

87



DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

RING GAUGE: 56 LENGTH: 6 1/4"
FILLER: DOM. REP., NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

LA GLORIA CUBANA TORPEDO

A dark torpedo with a firm draw. Tangy woody notes give way to some nougat and espresso before a damp-earth finish.
U.S.: \$8.19 U.K.: N/A

86

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miscellaneous

Abbreviated smokes grant a very particular wish among cigar lovers: the desire for a grand experience in a short period of time. The niche was filled by creating short, sometimes fat cigars with high-quality tobacco. One truly fantastic creation to come out of that need is the Padrón Serie 1926 No. 35, which scored 92 points. The Padróns successfully scaled down the characteristics found in the larger sizes of the Serie 1926 and rolled it into a four-inch flavor bomb. While the Avo Classic No. 5 may seem like it should be in another category, its dimensions sidestepped the parameters of every classification we have. It scored 90 points, as did the Cuban Hoyo de Monterrey Petit Robusto.



NICARAGUA

RING GAUGE: 48 LENGTH: 4"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

PADRÓN SERIE 1926 NO. 35

The rich, cocoa core of this dark, box-pressed cigar is framed by notes of maple and coconut. It performs beautifully, with an even burn and fine draw.
U.S.: \$11.40 U.K.: N/A

92



DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

RING GAUGE: 46 LENGTH: 6 7/8"
FILLER: DOM. REP.
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

AVO CLASSIC NO. 5

There's a sweet tea quality to this long cigar, complemented by a graham cracker note. It picks up intensity as it goes, developing a strong, coffee-like finish.
U.S.: \$9.20 U.K.: N/A

90



CUBA

RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 4"
FILLER: CUBA
BINDER: CUBA
WRAPPER: CUBA
BOX DATE: OCTOBER 2015

HOYO DE MONTERREY PETIT ROBUSTO

A near-pristine short robusto with a sweet, toasty maple and brown sugar quality. Hints of wood and nutmeg usher in the slightly sharp finish.
U.S.: N/A U.K.: £14.58

90



CUBA

RING GAUGE: 44 LENGTH: 3 1/2"
FILLER: CUBA
BINDER: CUBA
WRAPPER: CUBA
BOX DATE: NOVEMBER 2013

H. UPMANN HALF CORONA

The draw of this mini corona is firm, but still delivers a nutty smoke complemented by pleasant touches of coffee and cocoa bean.
U.S.: N/A U.K.: £9.25

89



NICARAGUA

RING GAUGE: 44 LENGTH: 5"
FILLER: HONDURAS, NICARAGUA
BINDER: BRAZIL
WRAPPER: U.S.A./CONN. BROADLEAF

LIGA PRIVADA ÚNICO SERIE DIRTY RAT

A near-black petit corona whose lush draw delivers a chewy, medium- to full-bodied smoke full of licorice and sugary notes before an earthy finish.
U.S.: \$14.50 U.K.: N/A

89



NICARAGUA

RING GAUGE: 46 LENGTH: 4"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

PERDOMO SMALL BATCH SERIES SUN GROWN HALF CORONA

A short cigar with a superb burn and draw that starts dry and woody before showing nutty characteristics with notes of nougat and spice.
U.S.: \$5.00 U.K.: N/A

89

**NICARAGUA**

RING GAUGE: 45 LENGTH: 4"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: HONDURAS

COHIBA NICARAGUA N45

Strong and hearty, this cigar is full of bold earth and baking chocolate flavor as well as savory leather, though an oily note persists, even into the finish.
U.S.: \$10.39 U.K.: N/A

88**DOMINICAN REPUBLIC**

RING GAUGE: 43 LENGTH: 3 1/2"
FILLER: DOM. REP.
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

DAVIDOFF ENTREACTO

Despite the diminutive size, this little cigar loads the palate with abundant amounts of medium-bodied smoke. It's woody and floral with a citrus note.
U.S.: \$8.80 U.K.: N/A

88**CUBA**

RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 3 1/2"
FILLER: CUBA
BINDER: CUBA
WRAPPER: CUBA
BOX DATE: JUNE 2015

PARTAGÁS SERIE D NO. 6

Soft and spongy to the touch, this petit robusto shows muted notes of walnut, vague spice and a hint of wood before a slightly bitter finish.
U.S.: N/A U.K.: £13.98

87**CUBA**

RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 4 3/8"
FILLER: CUBA
BINDER: CUBA
WRAPPER: CUBA
BOX DATE: JUNE 2015

VEGUEROS ENTRETIEMPO

A tannish robusto with thin veins and a firm draw. It's toasty and floral, but the finish is dry. A medium-bodied smoke.
U.S.: N/A U.K.: £14.47

87**NICARAGUA**

RING GAUGE: 60 LENGTH: 4 1/4"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

CASA MAGNA COLORADO SANCHO

Short, fat and oily, this cigar is covered in a dark wrapper. It's a predominantly tangy, woody smoke with touches of almonds and a tart finish.
U.S.: \$5.50 U.K.: N/A

86**DOMINICAN REPUBLIC**

RING GAUGE: 38 LENGTH: 8"
FILLER: NICARAGUA, DOM. REP.
BINDER: DOM. REP.
WRAPPER: DOM. REP.

NAT SHERMAN 1930 SUPER LANCERO

A long, slender cigar with a firm draw. Woody, spicy notes carry traces of sweetness, but damp notes and combustion issues affect the score.
U.S.: \$15.00 U.K.: N/A

85**HONDURAS**

RING GAUGE: 48 LENGTH: 4"
FILLER: DOM. REP., HONDURAS
BINDER: HONDURAS
WRAPPER: ECUADOR

ROOM 101 NAMAKUBI ROXXO

An excessively strong short robusto that settles down a bit to show a heavy earth and walnut character. Hints of red wine come through as well, though the finish is slightly bitter.
U.S.: \$7.90 U.K.: N/A

85**NICARAGUA**

RING GAUGE: 60 LENGTH: 4"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: BRAZIL

NUB MADURO 460

Heavy notes of minerals and rock salt come through the even draw of this short, fat cigar. A bit of sweetness precedes a charry finish.
U.S.: \$7.70 U.K.: N/A

84

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This impressive lineup of robustos delivered nine scores of 90 points or higher, and two cigars that scored 93 points. Both are Cuban, and fairly new to the Habanos S.A. portfolio. The Montecristo Open Master seems to have defied its own mission statement. When it debuted, the brand was marketed toward novice smokers who like to enjoy their cigars outdoors. But the level of complexity in the Master is better suited to a veteran than someone who occasionally lights up on the golf course. With a girth of 55 ring gauge, the Romeo y Julieta Wide Churchill is one of the thickest cigars that Cuba produces. It's an offshoot of the brand's emblematic Churchill size.



CUBA
RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 4 7/8"
FILLER: CUBA
BINDER: CUBA
WRAPPER: CUBA
BOX DATE: OCTOBER 2015

MONTECRISTO OPEN MASTER

Toasty layers of nutty impressions and raisin notes saturate the palate before a luxurious chocolate-like finish and a tangy undertone. Elegant and refined.
U.S.: N/A U.K.: £18.76

93



CUBA
RING GAUGE: 55 LENGTH: 5 1/8"
FILLER: CUBA
BINDER: CUBA
WRAPPER: CUBA
BOX DATE: SEPTEMBER 2015

ROMEO Y JULIETA WIDE CHURCHILL

The lush draw of this hefty robusto imparts a rich and heavy smoke laden with woody vanilla notes balanced by a floral element and fresh tobacco finish.
U.S.: N/A U.K.: £22.48

93



U.S.A.
RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 5 1/4"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

CASA FERNANDEZ MIAMI RESERVA COROJO ROBUSTO

The draw is a bit firm, but imparts a sweet and nutty smoke with touches of cocoa and almond. A pleasant, medium to full-bodied cigar.
U.S.: \$8.95 U.K.: N/A

91



HONDURAS
RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 5"
FILLER: NICARAGUA
BINDER: NICARAGUA
WRAPPER: NICARAGUA

ALEC BRADLEY TEMPUS NICARAGUA TERRA NOVA

There's a bit of an oily gleam to the wrapper of this dark, reddish-brown cigar. It's a toasty smoke accentuated by nutty notes and a sweet, caramel finish.
U.S.: \$7.00 U.K.: N/A

90



CUBA
RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 4 7/8"
FILLER: CUBA
BINDER: CUBA
WRAPPER: CUBA
BOX DATE: AUGUST 2015

BOLIVAR ROYAL CORONA

Pressed and veiny, this robusto is strong and peppery with heavy minerals and a smoked meat quality. The finish is tannic with a bit of bite.
U.S.: N/A U.K.: £16.53

90



HONDURAS
RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 5"
FILLER: HONDURAS
BINDER: HONDURAS
WRAPPER: HONDURAS

EIROA THE FIRST 20 YEARS 50 X 5 PRENSADO

Rumpled in appearance, this dark cigar draws very evenly, offering ample amounts of toasty, nutty smoke punctuated by notes of cocoa and licorice. Tastes better than it looks.
U.S.: \$12.00 U.K.: N/A

90

**CUBA**

RING GAUGE: 48 LENGTH: 5"

FILLER: CUBA

BINDER: CUBA

WRAPPER: CUBA

BOX DATE: MARCH 2007

**HOYO DE MONTERREY
HERMOSOS NO. 4 AÑEJADOS**

This beautifully made robusto wears a fine cap and an oily wrapper. The smoke has a floral quality, balanced by elements of wood, almond and touches of vanilla bean.

U.S.: N/A U.K.: £18.66

90

**DOMINICAN REPUBLIC**

RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 5"

FILLER: NICARAGUA

BINDER: ECUADOR

WRAPPER: MEXICO

**KRISTOFF GALERONES CENIZA DE PLATA
ROBUSTO**

There's a sweet and straightforward raisin-like quality to this cigar framed by notes of licorice, leather and earth. The burn is a bit uneven, but the raisin character remains constant.

U.S.: \$8.00 U.K.: N/A

90

**NICARAGUA**

RING GAUGE: 52 LENGTH: 5 1/4"

FILLER: NICARAGUA

BINDER: NICARAGUA

WRAPPER: ECUADOR

MY FATHER NO. 1 ROBUSTO

Sweet and spicy notes of gingersnap and baked breads segue into a cereal note before a fairly light black tea finish. There's slight resistance to the draw, but the burn stays very even.

U.S.: \$9.70 U.K.: N/A

90

**HONDURAS**

RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 5 1/4"

FILLER: HONDURAS, DOM. REP.,

NICARAGUA

BINDER: U.S.A./CONN. HABANO

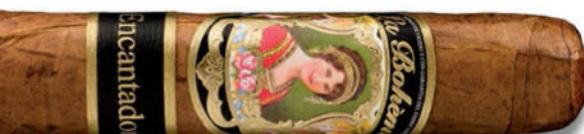
WRAPPER: HONDURAS

HOYO DE TRADICIÓN EPIPURE

Subtly pressed with soft edges and a flat head. The smoke has a creamy texture, imparting bready, nutty notes and a hint of spice.

U.S.: \$6.29 U.K.: N/A

89

**DOMINICAN REPUBLIC**

RING GAUGE: 46 LENGTH: 5"

FILLER: DOM. REP.

BINDER: DOM. REP.

WRAPPER: ECUADOR

LA BOHÈME ENCANTADOR TURIN

The very peppery start of this box-pressed robusto calms down to show more of a sweet and floral character before an anise finish.

U.S.: \$10.50 U.K.: N/A

89

**NICARAGUA**

RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 5"

FILLER: NICARAGUA, BRAZIL

BINDER: MEXICO

WRAPPER: U.S.A./CONN. SHADE

NEW WORLD CONNECTICUT ROBUSTO

Wheaty, hay-like notes are buttressed by a strong citrus character, though the finish is a bit dry.

A mild to medium-bodied cigar.

U.S.: \$6.00 U.K.: N/A

88

**DOMINICAN REPUBLIC**

RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 5"

FILLER: DOM. REP.

BINDER: DOM. REP.

WRAPPER: U.S.A./CONN. SHADE

ASHTON MAGNUM

A bright, cedary cigar with a bit of nutmeg and a creamy lemon-like undertone. The finish becomes slightly acidic.

U.S.: \$8.50 U.K.: N/A

87

**HONDURAS**

RING GAUGE: 50 LENGTH: 5"

FILLER: DOM. REP., HONDURAS

BINDER: HONDURAS

WRAPPER: ECUADOR

BLIND MAN'S BLUFF ROBUSTO

Tart and woody, this medium-bodied robusto burns unevenly. The finish is thin and papery.

U.S.: \$7.50 U.K.: N/A

86

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Rum
DIPLOMÁTICO

Cigars are listed first by country and then by score. Please refer to the main tasting pages for notes and prices.

CIGAR AFICIONADO'S 100-POINT SCALE

Classic
95–100
Outstanding
90–94
Very good to excellent
80–89
Average to good
commercial quality
70–79
Don't waste your money
60–70
Not available
n/a
*Note: all prices are
manufacturers' suggested
retail, before taxes.*

COSTA RICA

92 MBombay Classic Perfecto

CUBA

93 Montecristo Open Master
93 Romeo y Julieta Wide Churchill
92 Cohiba Esplendido
90 Bolivar Royal Corona
90 H. Upmann Corona Major (Tubo)
90 Hoyo de Monterrey Hermosos No. 4 Añejados
90 Hoyo de Monterrey Petit Robusto
89 H. Upmann Half Corona
89 Hoyo de Monterrey Epicure No. 1
88 Romeo y Julieta Romeo No. 1 (Tubo)
88 Trinidad Coloniales
87 Partagás Serie D No. 6
87 San Cristobal de la Habana La Punta
87 Vegueros Entretiempo

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

91 Flores y Rodriguez Connecticut Valley Reserve Belicoso
91 Henry Clay Stalk Cut Toro
91 Montecristo Epic Churchill
90 Ashton Estate Sun Grown 22-Year Salute
90 Avo Classic No. 5
90 Casa Cuba Doble Seis
90 Kristoff Galerones Ceniza de Plata Robusto
90 La Flor Dominicana Cameroon Cabinet Torpedo
89 La Bohème Encantador Turin
89 Montecristo White Montecristo Court
88 Arturo Fuente Cuban Corona Maduro
88 Davidoff Entreacto
87 Ashton Magnum
87 Davidoff Millennium Blend Series Churchill
87 Project 805 Churchill
86 Davidoff Grand Cru No. 2
86 E.P. Carrillo New Wave Connecticut Gran Via
86 La Gloria Cubana Torpedo
86 VegaFina Nicaragua Corona
85 Nat Sherman 1930 Super Lancero
84 La Aurora 107 Maduro Corona

HONDURAS

90 Alec Bradley Tempus Nicaragua Terra Nova
90 Eiroa The First 20 Years 50 x 5 Prensado
89 Alec Bradley Fine & Rare JRS 10=(86)

89 Hammer + Sickie Hermitage No. 1 Churchill
89 Hoyo de Tradición Epicure
89 Padilla San Andrés Toro
88 Camacho Connecticut Corona
88 Heritage By Dunhill Toro
87 La Palina El Diario KB II
87 Rocky Patel Twentieth Anniversary Toro
87 Romeo y Julieta Reserve Churchill
86 Blind Man's Bluff Robusto
86 Punch Double Corona EMS
85 Room 101 Namakubi Roxxo
84 H. Upmann Legacy Corona

NICARAGUA

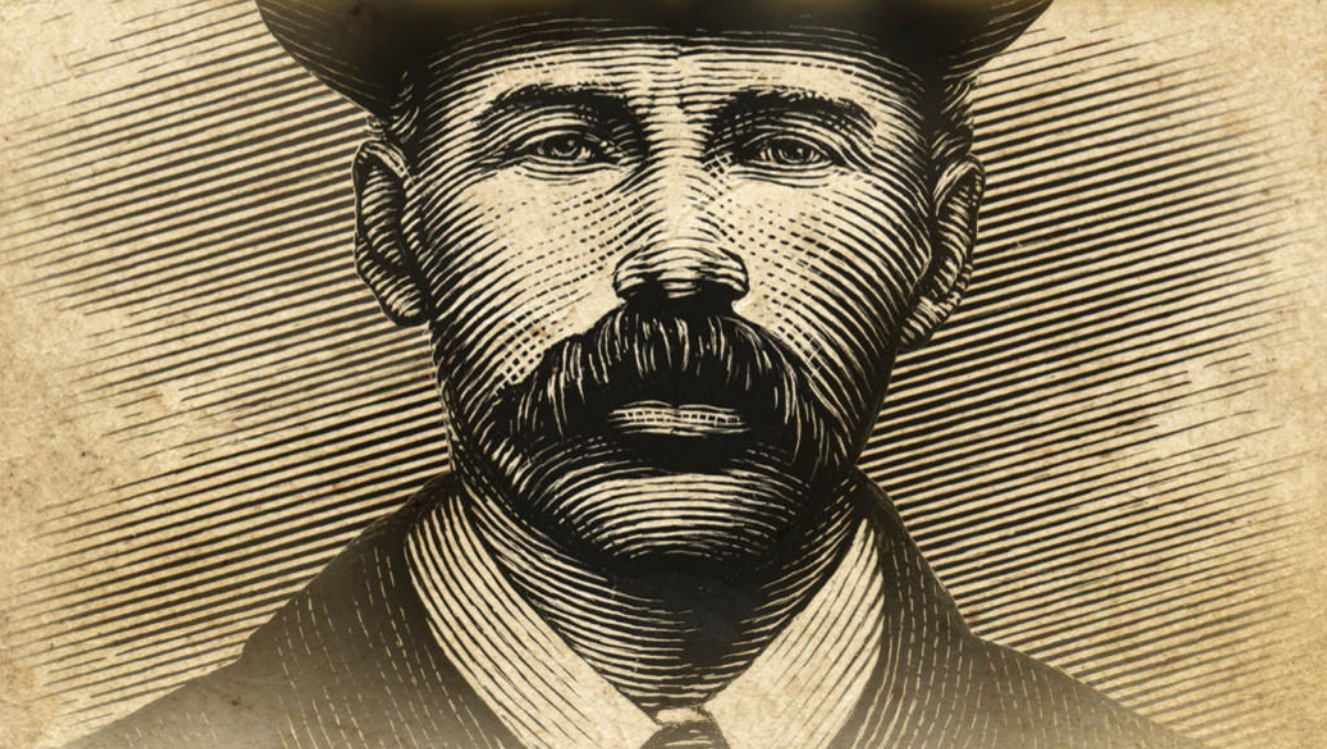
93 Norteño Robusto Grande
92 Illusione mk
92 Padrón Serie 1926 No. 35
91 Brick House Corona Larga
91 El Güegüense Toro Huaco
91 Espinosa Especial No. 1
91 Padrón 1964 Anniversary Series Corona
90 My Father No. 1 Robusto
90 Oliva Serie G Maduro Churchill
90 Tabaquero Hamlet Paredes Salomon
89 Flor de las Antillas Belicoso
89 Gurkha Cellar Reserve Platinum Hedonism
89 Joya Red Toro
89 La Aroma de Cuba Edicion Especial No. 4
89 Liga Privada T52 Belicoso
89 Liga Privada Único Serie Dirty Rat
89 Nat Sherman Panamericana Cervantes
89 Perdomo Small Batch Series Sun Grown Half Corona
89 San Cristobal Revelation Triumph
89 Sublimes Grande
88 Cohiba Nicaragua N45
88 Jericho Hill LBV
88 Leccia Tobacco White Perfecto
88 New World Connecticut Robusto
86 CAO Flathead Steel Horse Apehanger
86 Casa Magna Colorado Sancho
84 NUb Maduro 460

U.S.A.

91 Casa Fernandez Miami Reserva Corojo Robusto
88 Tatuaje Cabinet Unico

IT'S NICE TO BE

WANTED



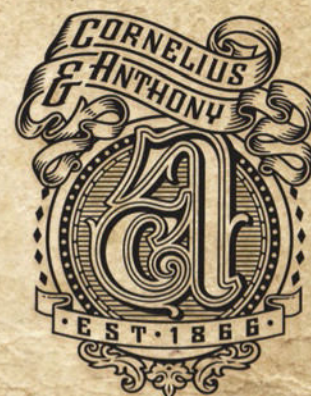
*"If you're going to be wanted for something,
be wanted for something great."*

—Cornelius Bailey, AKA Straight Shooter

That's exactly what Cornelius Bailey set out to do
five generations ago. And he's been wanted for
growing the finest tobacco ever since.



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your just reward awaits.



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Cigars Are Not A Safe Alternative To Cigarettes.



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CorneliusAndAnthony.com

connoisseur's corner

Connoisseurs prize cigars that come packed in cabinets of 50. There's more room for air to circulate around the cigars, which is good for aging, and there are double the number of cigars found in a typical box, which is just good overall. A tidy Punch Punch with a quarter century of age proved the potency of cabinet selections with its near-perfect performance. A look at this Cuban corona gorda shows, first, just how thick cigars have become in the modern day, for this "fat corona's" ring gauge of 46 seems downright slim by today's standards. The unbanded cigar blossoms with the flavors of sweet baking spices, earning it a classic rating on our 100-point scale. An unheralded Diplomaticos No. 2 from 1995 was sweet and subtle, also earning a classic accolade.



PUNCH PUNCH (1991)

A creamy brown cigar that is somewhat light in color, taken from a cabinet of 50. It begins with a perfect draw. It's mellow, with rich flavors of cinnamon and nutmeg and just the right amount of sweetness. A cigar you could smoke all day and into the night. —*Marvin R. Shanken*

98



DIPLOMATICOS NO. 2 (1995)

This piramide is a doppelgänger of a Montecristo No. 2—in appearance alone. The flavor is far more mellow, without the bracing leather one expects from a Monte 2. After a slow, dry start, it develops a sweet, nutty character with hints of baker's chocolate and nuts. A nuanced, delicious cigar with a sweet core that never gets cloying. —*David Savona*

95



COHIBA 35 ANIVERSARIO PIRÁMIDE (2001)

This cigar was made to celebrate a big anniversary for the Cohiba brand, and it was part of a limited run of humidors. The draw is perfect. An early grassiness soon fades, replaced by vanilla notes with a touch of chocolate. It also intensifies, taking on a medium body, but it never achieves the level of flavor that would merit a classic score. A fine smoke, better than the vintage, but certainly not one of Cuba's best. —*David Savona*

94



HOYO DE MONTERREY LE HOYO DES DIEUX (1994)

This skinny smoke, which has no band, is woody and austere at first. As it warms, almond notes emerge to sweeten the core of wood. The finish is earthy, the smoke nuanced, with a touch of pencil lead on the finish. A quite pleasant cigar with a medium body that is smoking well. —*David Savona*

93



H. UPMANN NO. 4 (1995)

More than two decades in a box has given this petit corona a subtly pressed appearance. The combustion is perfect, the draw, quite ample. Though first puffs start off a bit dusty and dry, the cigar opens to show a walnut and pecan nuttiness with a hint of cinnamon and a faint floral character. Mild overall and probably a little past its prime. —*Gregory Mottola*

91



SAINT LUIS REY LONSDALE 1995

The lonsdale size for the Saint Luis Rey brand was discontinued years ago, but this exhibits perfect combustion, taking flame immediately. The smoke is richly textured with layers of nougat, vanilla bean and sweet lavender notes, but a nagging bitterness refused to dissipate. —*Gregory Mottola*

90



FULL-FLAVORED ULTRA SMOOTH EXTRA-SATISFACTION

Made with only Jalapa Ligeros
from Nicaragua's northern most
tobacco region, the Cain Daytona
delivers a solid, but smooth,
medium-bodied taste.

Cain
DAYTONA 



Master *of* Tobacco

BY DAVID SAVONA PORTRAITS BY JEFFERY SALTER

José Orlando Padrón sits down in his conference room in Miami, a half-smoked cigar bearing his name clutched in his right hand, photos from his youth spread before him. On June 10, he will turn 90. For more than half of his life—nearly 52 years as you read this article—he has been making Padrón cigars. The earliest Padróns were inexpensive smokes puffed in Miami cafeterias by Cuban expats much like himself; today they are prized across the United States and around the globe. His Nicaraguan-made cigars take high score after high score from this magazine, including having garnered the Cigar of the Year award a record three times.

He's a man of meticulous records, with a mind that recalls special days from decades ago with ease and a booming laugh that lights up a room. He unfolds a piece of paper, which he shows to a visitor with a smile, pointing to the bottom figure: 180 million. It's the number of cigars he has sold in his lifetime, a remarkable achievement given that his has never been one of the bigger cigar companies in the world. His

Nearing 90,
José Orlando Padrón
reflects on a life spent
around tobacco and a
career that's yielded
more Cigars of the Year
than any other brand

work has been instrumental in creating demand for cigars made in Nicaragua, which today runs neck-and-neck with the Dominican Republic as the world's leading producer of premium cigars.

In February, executive editor David Savona sat down with Padrón over rich cigars and strong Cuban coffee for a conversation about what he has learned in his lifetime, how he wants to be remembered and how things have changed in a half-century of making cigars. His son Jorge translated. There were more than a few surprises.

Savona: What does Nicaragua mean to you?

Padrón: It's the second Cuba. But it also represents all of my success.

Q: You originally made cigars with different tobacco. Talk about how you began using tobaccos from Nicaragua.

A: In 1968, that's the first year I started using Nicaraguan tobacco in my cigars. And look at the jump [shows the paper, documenting his sales]. I went from 479,000 cigars to more than 800,000 cigars a year.

Q: Is it safe to say that Nicaraguan tobacco changed Padrón Cigars?

A: Yes. It helped, and it changed the start of our company.

Q: What kind of tobacco were you using before Nicaragua?

A: Connecticut broadleaf, Brazil, Puerto Rico and Jamaica.

Q: How did you come to find Nicaraguan tobacco?



For more than half of his life, José Orlando Padrón has made cigars that bear his name. He founded Padrón Cigars in 1964.



José Orlando Padrón (top right) in his Miami office and warehouse with his son Jorge. An early sample of Nicaraguan tobacco made the elder Padrón change his cigar blend. Padrón (above photo at left) with Roberto Martínez in 1967, standing with his first shipment of Nicaraguan cigar tobacco.

A: Roberto Martínez worked with Anastasio Somoza [the leader of Nicaragua, who went on to create the Joya de Nicaragua brand in 1968]. The guy says I have this tobacco from Nicaragua. He called me.

Q: When was this?

A: March or, April, more or less, in 1967. Out of the blue. I met with him in Biscayne Boulevard. He had the tobacco samples in his luggage. He put the samples on the top of the bed. I made a cigar. After having the first two drags of the tobacco, I felt like I was back in Cuba.

Q: What did you think later, when you visited Nicaragua and saw the fields?

A: I thought the land, the soil was very similar to that of Cuba. I told Somoza I thought it was the second coming of Cuba.

Q: At the time, you were making cigars here in Miami. When you received this tobacco from Nicaragua, what did you do to your blend?

A: I changed it completely. I gave a lot of people the new cigar to taste, and they said it was perfect.

Q: How much were your cigars at this time?

A: (Laughs) Thirty cents apiece. There were three people who benefited from this—the Padrón smokers in Miami, Padrón and Nicaragua. Up until the time when we started selling to

retail stores, most of our cigars were sold to the local community. Cafeterias, walk-in business. It was all done in-house. In 1981, I sold almost 6 million cigars here in Miami.

Q: When did you start using Nicaraguan wrappers?

A: In 1970, when I opened the cigar factory in Nicaragua, I started using Nicaraguan wrappers. In 1972, I bought my first two farms in Nicaragua.

Q: How many farms do you have now?

A: Right now we have four that we own.

Q: You started your business in 1964. If the Cuban embargo had been dropped right away, say in 1970, what would you have done with your business?

A: I would have never abandoned Nicaragua. It's basically the same way I think now.

Q: What if the embargo had been lifted even sooner, before you opened a factory in Nicaragua?

A: I would have gone back to Cuba. Remember you're talking to a Cuban. It's like asking you if you want to go home.

Q: If the embargo is dropped tomorrow—what happens?

A: That remains to be seen, but we would obviously want to have the opportunity to have tobacco from Cuba or make cigars in Cuba. But we would never abandon Nicaragua. I'm not a big fan of having partners. My partners are my family. So a lot remains to be seen as to how business can be conducted in Cuba.

Q: What if you could get Cuban tobacco right now? Would you want to make a blend, some Cuban tobacco, some Nicaraguan?

A: That is the interesting part of the situation. If we're able to get Cuban tobacco, you could make an all-Cuban Padrón, a Padrón all Nicaraguan like we have now, and another that's a combination of the two. If we were given an opportunity to go back to the farms, we would go back.

Q: How many farms did you have in Cuba?

A: My family had one farm, in the area of Piloto. And my wife's family had 13, in Las Obas.

Q: How has your philosophy of cigarmaking changed over the years, if it's changed at all?

A: From the day I started this company, my main goal was to satisfy the immigrants who

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“When I started the company, I did it with the idea of making people happy. Artists live from the applause. I live from the smoke—from smokers smoking my cigars.”

were leaving Cuba. I thought they would miss their homeland, but not their cigar. These consumers who were smoking cigars their entire lives, I wanted them to smoke cigars they would enjoy. That hasn't changed. When I started the company, I did it with the idea of making people happy. Artists live from the applause. I live from the smoke—from smokers smoking my cigars. My customers care about me. They kiss me, they hug me, and that makes me happy. I hope and expect that my children will continue to do the same.

Q: You started off trying to give Cubans the taste they could no longer get. Did you ever think that so many other people—not just Cubans—would love and embrace your product?

A: No. I never imagined it. Everybody used to tell me the U.S. consumer didn't smoke stronger cigars, which was actually true in those days. In the early days, all of the people who bought cigars here were diehard Cuban smokers. None of them used cigar cutters. None of them. They used their teeth. One day I had an American customer here who asked for a cigar cutter. There was a Cuban next to him—I said ask him for a cigar cutter. The guy took out his dentures and showed them to him. (Laughs heartily.)

Q: What about you, do you ever use a cigar cutter?

A: No! Never.

Q: Always your teeth?

A: Always.

Q: That's a lot of cigars you've cut with those teeth.

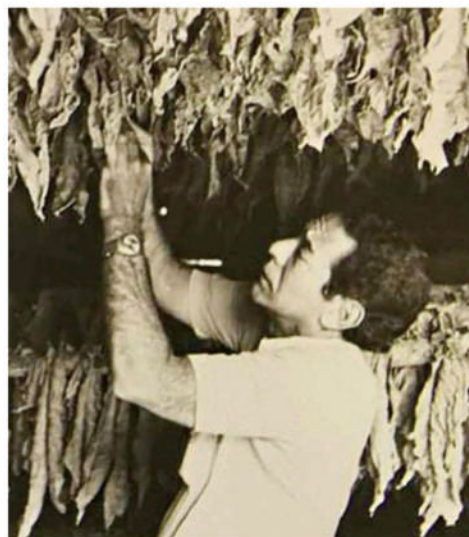
A: In Cuba, I used to smoke H. Upmann No. 4 [a corona]. And I would look for the cigars that had the beetle holes in them.

Q: Wait, beetle holes? Why?

A: The beetle never eats tobacco that is bitter, or acidic. I would bite off the end, take the tobacco and with a pencil stick it in to the [beetle] hole.

Q: Really? I've never heard this story. You're blowing me away here. How often would you find a box with a beetle hole?

A: We're talking about Cuba in the 1940s.



Padrón in 1976, examining leaves of tobacco in a curing barn in Condega, Nicaragua.

In Cuba, in some of the stores, you would find cigars that had that.

Q: Do you remember how much a box of those would cost back then?

A: Twenty five cents for a cigar. That was all the way up to the '50s. In Cuba, I always had a guayabera on, and I always had cigars in my pocket. When I would see people, I would give them a cigar. It was the norm. My grandmother in Cuba had all the tools of a cigar roller, and she would make cigars for all the family members. My grandfather would get up every day at five in the morning and sit and look at the tobacco and then roll a cigar in his hands. They were strong cigars.

Q: Made with tobacco all from that farm?

A: Different farmers would exchange tobacco with other farmers.

Q: How much was tobacco back in those early days?

A: It was inexpensive. In 1936 the price for 100 pounds of leaf tobacco was about \$5. Prices started going up around 1942.

Q: Because of World War II?

A: Yes. The price went from \$5 per 100 pounds to \$45 for 100 pounds. There are two ways to harvest tobacco: Priming [harvesting leaf by leaf] or stalk priming [taking the entire plant at once, stalk and all]. The price for the one that was

primed, which is the same way we do it now, was \$45. Tobacco harvested with the whole stalk was less expensive, about \$30 for 100 pounds.

Q: They did stalk cutting in Cuba?

A: Yes.

Q: Did you do it at your farm?

A: A part of the farm. Everything else was primed.

Q: Was that to give it a different taste?

A: The tobacco on the stalk was stronger.

Q: What's the best piece of advice you have ever received?

A: I have to think about that. I've received a lot of advice over the years, especially from my father and grandfather. One was not getting involved in politics, which proved to be a good decision, because after the war in Nicaragua I didn't have any problems.

Q: What's the most important piece of advice you've given Jorge?

A: To be humble. And to do the right thing.

Q: Years and years from now, many years in the future—how do you want to be remembered?

A: As someone who has helped others. What I've had I've shared with other people, with my family.

Q: What's the best cigar you've ever made?

A: We've always tried to make our cigars as great as possible. And for every type of consumer. For those who can't spend \$20 on a cigar they can still buy a Padrón for \$6 and get a cigar they will enjoy. I've never forgotten where I came from. We still make a lot of cigars at price points that are accessible to most.

Q: What are you going to do on June 10—your 90th birthday?

A: At this point, I have no plans. I'm going to get up early, I'm going to come into the office, and I'm going to wait for my grandkids, my employees, my wife and my children to bring me a cake. And I'm sure I'll smoke a few cigars. ❖

For a photo gallery of José Orlando Padrón through the years, visit cigaraficionado.com.



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FAMILY RUN SINCE 1887

THE LAWYER WHO WROTE HISTORY

After a fruitful law practice, Ronald Balson switched tracks and became an unlikely best-selling author

BY KENNETH SHOULER



he Cigar Inn on Manhattan's east side is alive, if otherwise unremarkable, for a Monday night. Some smokers glance at a Kansas basketball game. Others finger their phones endlessly. Still another tilts her head way back and looks up: she draws on a cigar ever so slowly and deliberately forces the smoke back out. Other couples compare smokes. But at one table a man smoking an Ashton laughs as he divulges something extraordinary about himself: "I had never

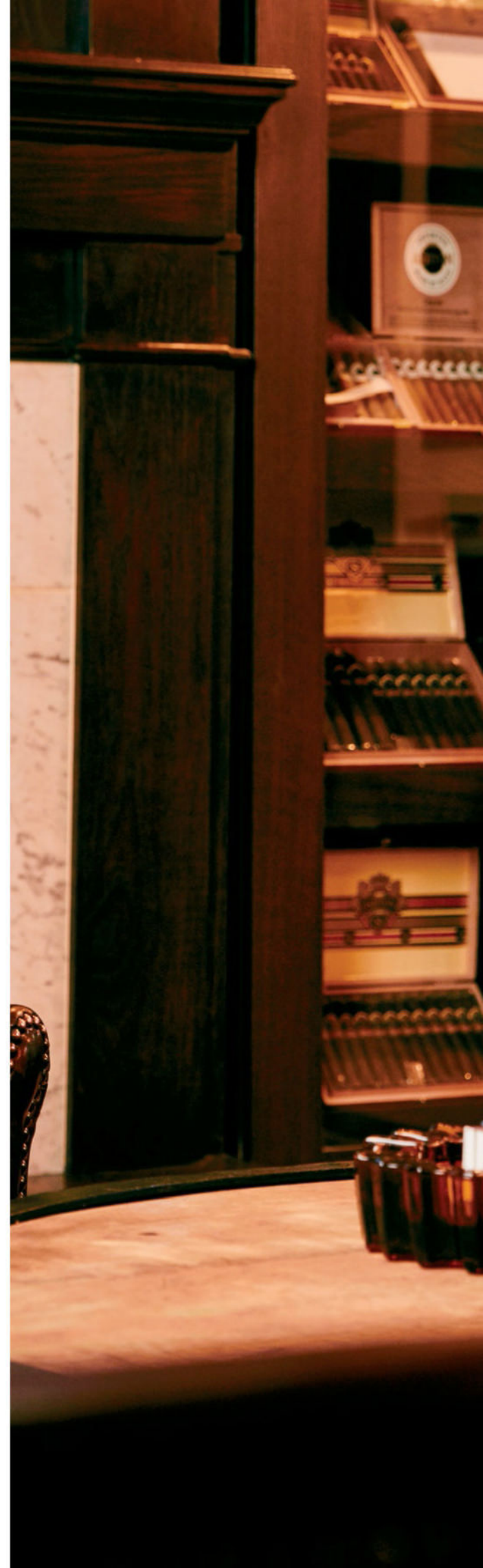
written fiction, though some judges would argue with that."

He is Ronald Balson, suddenly a best-selling author at age 71. And the judges he speaks of are not literary critics, but the type who dress in robes and before whom he once argued cases as a civil litigation attorney in Chicago. But six years ago he embarked upon a thriving writing career that started with—of all things—a self-published historical novel. Word of mouth attracted a publishing house, and his *Once We Were Brothers*, a story about an 82-year-old Polish Holocaust survivor hell bent on exposing a renowned Chicago philanthropist as a former Nazi SS officer and murderer, became an improbable *New York Times* best-seller. He followed with another best-seller, *Saving Sophie*, which depicts an accountant desperate to rescue his daughter from terrorist kidnappers. Now, his loyal fan base awaits a third: in September *Karolina's Twins* comes out. All told, he has spun three historical novels since he was 65.

This litigator, who once defended an NBA star from a false charge of point-shaving, is now discussing his work with book clubs and dreaming of more to write. His Facebook page is a veritable bulletin board announcing meeting times for book signings and discussion groups. Balson appreciates his preternatural success. "Life is great," he reflects. "I get more than I'm entitled to."

You hear broadcasters speak of athletes having a "game face." If there is a writer's equivalent, Balson doesn't own one. His smile is affectionate and collegial. His dress—a blazer and slacks—is relaxed. No studied or posed look is intended to make you

PORTTRAITS BY NATHAN KIRKMAN
PHOTOGRAPHED AT BIGGS, CHICAGO





ponder, “What deep thought is this author thinking?” Balson is five-foot-six and broad-chested. His heart, the undeniable source of his success, seems inversely proportionate to his stature. Asked when he decided to lead a literary life, Balson answers pithily: “There wasn’t a date or a time or an event where I made a decision to lead a ‘literary life.’ I just added writing books to my nonliterary life.”

But success didn’t come overnight. For five years all he got were rejection letters. But he persisted. And his early difficulties in getting published reads like a book within a book, with its own backstory.

Ron Balson lived in Chicago until the middle of grade school, when his family moved to the suburbs. “I had a good education,” he recalls. “I went to a really good high school. I played a lot of golf. My mother sent me down to Tulane [in New Orleans] because she wanted me to be a doctor. I started out doing all these premed courses. I hated it.” He was drawn to English and history and became a history major. “It probably set me up for writing historical fiction.” That and being sports editor of the college newspaper. He then taught in the public school system in Chicago for seven years while attending DePaul University College of Law at night.

In his legal career, he would assist on a memorable high-profile case decades before he got a sniff of literary fame. In 1986, he represented John “Hot Rod” Williams, a Tulane basketball star accused of point-shaving. Balson paints a picture of an inner-city athlete with little money placed

Chicago suburb; Monica was homeowner’s association president; they instituted community celebrations; he coached his kids in sports.

To fulfill the next ambition in Balson’s life he needed one more thing: a story. “I always wanted to write fiction,” he says. “But I didn’t find the right thing to be inspired about, until I was involved in a complex telecommunications case that took me to Poland. I took several weeks travelling around Poland. Poland’s history, with its scars that are still there since the war, moved me at that point. The research for *Once We Were Brothers* took me over two years. Because the reader wants to know how the city is laid out, when the deportations occurred, where the jails were—it’s all there in the research.”

The writing reflects the many facets of Balson: the lawyer, researcher and the teacher, who explained the finer points of jurisprudence to law students at the University of Chicago for 25 years. “Litigators write; we write motions and memoranda, we write arguments and appeals,” he says. “Any successful trial lawyer knows that you have to paint an interesting story for the jury to follow.”

His books simmer with historical details that are sometimes placed in the mouths of his characters. The accuser in *Once We Were Brothers* neatly sums up how the tide turned for Hitler’s Germany in the fall of 1942: “Up to that time, the German army had seemed unstoppable. Rommel’s Afrika Korps was in command of North Africa and the German Sixth Army, using Romanian, Hungarian, and Italian divisions for support, was about to take Stalingrad. But...[Hitler] had overreached himself.”

Philosophical discussions emerge naturally as well. Asked if there is a

life after death, the same character answers, “That’s the jackpot question, isn’t it?” and traces his positive belief to his religious studies: “Each time one of the Patriarchs dies—Isaac, Jacob, Aaron, and Moses—the Bible recites, ‘He was gathered to his people.’ Those passages say to me that the essence of our loved ones still exists, and when we die we will be gathered to them.”

Balson admits to absorbing the work of Herman Wouk, the 100-year-old novelist who wrote the classic *The Winds of War*, and Leon Uris who lured his readers with remarkable story telling in historical tomes such as *Exodus* and *Trinity*. “They are craftsmen; I aspire to their brilliance in the feeblest of ways,” he says.

He writes slowly, rolling patience and a perfectionist’s longing into one. If the words are not coming, he waits. And waits. “Sometimes I write all day just to get a couple of pages. On a good day, if the words are flow-

ing, if the inspirations are hitting me and I’m in a groove, I can go seven or eight hours.” The words must be just right. “I am very critical of my own writing,” he says. “I want every sentence to be written just so.” He compares the process to painting a picture: “You want the colors to be right.”

Balson also knows when to push back from the laptop. “Smoking is a break from your to-do list, a break from all the demands that are on your schedule all day long. Just to take an hour or 45 minutes and sit there and read and have a drink and smoke a cigar—it kind of forces you to relax.

“I like an Ashton,” Balson says. Sitting up straight on a plush couch, the author lets the smoke of the Dominican cigar out slowly, savoring the taste. “It’s a consistent, mild smoke. I’m not crazy about strong cigars—they leave me a little light-headed.”

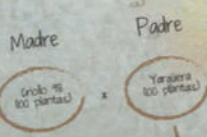
Like his plunge in literature, there wasn’t a set date for adopting cigars



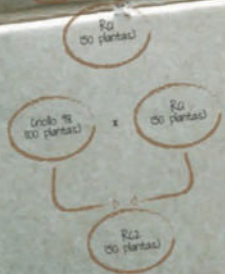
Balson’s first novel, *Once We Were Brothers*, took an unusual path to popularity: self-publishing. It was picked up by a publisher, and *Saving Sophie* followed. *Karolina’s Twins* is due in the fall.

in an environment of privileged students. Some of the players were approached by students to manipulate point spreads. Williams denied involvement, but Balson says his teammates who had been “flipped” by prosecutors fingered him. “Why Hot Rod?” he asks, his voice loud and a bit angry. “Because he was the star. He was all-SCC. He got the big contract with Cleveland. These other kids didn’t get pro contracts. So they all testified against him and said it was Hot Rod. At the end of the day they couldn’t prove the case,” Balson says triumphantly.

Across those 30 years Balson and his wife Monica raised eight children. “They are all successful in one way or another,” he says. “Oh, how’s your bracket?” Ron asks, referring to March Madness. His features Kansas, where three of his kids went to school. The Balsons’ family life has filled with community involvement: They were Citizens of the Year in their



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A smoke, a drink and a good read is Balson's favorite respite from the discipline of writing.

either. "I smoked because my grandfather smoked," Balson recalls with a trace of a Chicago accent. "He smoked all the time—in his house, in his car, everywhere. I just liked the aroma. I started in my 20s. I didn't have any money, so I smoked Antonio y Cleopatra."

Later, while doing research in Israel on *Saving Sophie*, he discovered a cozy store named Freddie's Cigars and Wine on hotel row in Tel Aviv. There he also discovered Cuban cigars, specifically his first Trinidad. He pairs that with a Macallan Scotch.

Besides cigars, he has another ally. "My wife is the sounding board," he relates. "She is the first editor. I write 20 to 30 pages and let her see it. She is my typical reader: not an English teacher, nor a writer herself. But she can be very critical. She might say, 'This paragraph is confusing to me.' And I go back and look at it and she may be right." The dedication of his book reads, "To my wife, Monica, with whom I dance through life."

Some ask if writing is lonely. He replies that he spends time with his characters, even talks with them. A story outline is not the starting point; his characters are. The lawyer Katherine Lockhart and private

investigator Liam Taggart from his first novel are essentially composites of people he's met over 43 years of lawyering. "The story is about the characters. If you can create characters that people care about, that people identify with, then you can take them back into that period of time. My characters are real people. My characters are as real to me as you are sitting there. Only I know them better." On his desk he keeps a quote from Joan Didion, aspiring to its sentiment: "I am a writer. Imagining what someone will say or do comes to me as naturally as breathing."

The pace of Balson's writing is also crucial. A series of conflicts fuels the reader's interest and becomes a subtext of the story. The prose never bogs down with lengthy sentences or baffling jargon. It helps immeasurably that he writes in brief, user-friendly chapters.

"People have said that my writing is very adaptable to a screenplay." An upstart production company, Cool People Productions, acquired the film rights. "There is a lot of dialogue and there are short scenes. Especially in a book like *Once We Were Brothers*, which goes back and forth between the present [in Chicago] and the past [in Poland]."

As brisk and thrilling as the book is, it almost didn't get published. Balson worked on it from 2005 to 2010 but garnered little interest at a time when he was heavily involved working for a big firm with a 300-person practice. The demands of the practice took a lot of time. Meanwhile, the book was getting rejected. "I still don't know to this day how many people ever read sample chapters or query letters," he says. "Publishers have pre-printed rejection post cards that say 'Doesn't suit our needs at this time.' My favorite was 'I liked it but I didn't love it.'"

Did he doubt himself? "Yes because rejection is like a body punch. You can take a few of them, but they are cumulative. They take their toll. If you get rejected dozens of times you start to say, 'They're right and I'm wrong.'" But rejection didn't stop him. He spent more than \$10,000 to self-publish the book with Berwick Court Publishing, a firm started by his son, Matt. "After we kept getting rejected, I put the book on Amazon. I didn't do any marketing. I wouldn't know today what to do. My son Matt was my marketing arm. We got into Barnes & Noble and he got us through the distributors Baker & Taylor and Ingram."

Then word of mouth kick-started sales. "You have to ask yourself, 'Why did I read the last book I read?' It was probably because someone said to you, 'I read a great book.' Or you asked, 'I finished a book, got any recommendations?' All of a sudden in September of 2011 we sold 1,000 books," says Balson. "And the next month 3,000, and the next month 5,000. Soon we were over 100,000. The book sold 125,000 copies before St. Martin's discovered it."

Success is a fuse that gets lit in the oddest of ways. A most unlikely occasion led St. Martin's to adopt Balson's book. "Kathy Huck [an editor with St. Martin's Press] was home for Christmas when her aunt gave her the book and said, 'I love this book and my friends are all reading it. You should read it,'" Balson relates. Huck resisted, but her aunt convinced her to consider the book. While she was reading it on a train a conductor approached her, and he stopped and said, "That's a really good book." When she asked how he knew that, he told her that a lot of people on the train were reading it. "She looked me up and found me," Balson says. "We talked and she brought me into St. Martin's Press." Since St. Martin's took it on, running an enormous ad in *The New York Times* for the October, 2013 publication date, sales have climbed to the 500,000 mark.

In Italy it was published as *I Only Want to Be With You* with a cover stressing the romantic angle by depicting a boy and a girl standing in water before mountains. Now his fan base wants to know what is next in the life of characters Liam and Katherine. Will they get married and have children? "They want to know that, especially my female readers," he says. "I heard that 80 percent of fiction is read by women. When I first started writing *Once We Were Brothers* I did not envision the lawyer being a female. I didn't envision her having a relationship with the private investigator, but then that came to me."

Even those not part of his fan base are drawn in by his characters. Readers often root for a just conclusion. "Don't you think you have to do that in a novel?" Ron asks. "Don't you think that you have to have something for the reader to root for and then hope it happens? It's almost like going for the baseball game. You root for someone. Don't you think a reader wants to have some skin in the game?"

It was during his *Once We Were Brothers* book tour that Balson was introduced to several survivors of World War II concentration camps. The story of one courageous woman, Faye, who grew up in Poland and survived Auschwitz, became the basis for *Karolina's Twins*.

"I have a personal connection to each one of my novels. In *Saving*

Sophie, the protagonist, an accountant Jack Sommers, manages at a commercial closing to divert by a fraudulent wire transfer \$88 million. Well, I was at a closing like that—a \$300 million closing. It occurred to me as I was sitting there, 'Wow, what if I could get my opponent here (the other lawyer) to sign off on a phony transfer.' Of course, we would both have to disappear and live somewhere else for the rest of our lives! But if we could do it, and if the timing was right—get it out late in the day—I think we could do it.

"I've been to Israel several times, so I know about Palestinian-Israeli disputes. I know about people who lived in the West Bank—I've been to the homes of the people who live in Hebron. We had pizza sitting under the Sukkah [or tent] in Hebron during the Jewish holiday of Sukkot. I have represented Russians who have an in to the Russian community. So all of those things in one way or another gave me material for a plotline."

Ron has one more story to tell. "There's a guy I buy my stereo equipment from in one of the Northern suburbs. I thought he was from Eastern Europe, and I thought I would bring him a copy of *Once We Were Brothers*. I signed it over to him and said 'Here, I hope you enjoy it.' Then he calls me and says, 'I want you to come over and talk to me.' He says,

'Well, I have to tell you that I was hidden by a family during the war, outside Warsaw. A Christian family hid my mother and I—when we pretended to be Christian during the war—and then we escaped to France.' In his room he had dozens of books about the Holocaust, mostly history books. 'One thing I love about your book,' he said, 'is that you can read a history book. You can take a class on World War II. You can read about the Holocaust. But at the end of the book there are just a lot of facts in your mind that don't stay with you. But when you wrap it up in a story with individuals, then it sticks with you. That's the best way to teach history.'"

That truth is self-evident when you read *Once We Were Brothers*. ❖

Kenneth Shouler is a philosophy professor at the County College of Morris and is a frequent contributor to CIGAR AFICIONADO.



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FEATURED CIGAR

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For a full tasting, see page two.

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A SEASON OF FESTIVALS

CIGAR FESTIVALS AROUND IN WINTER
and span Nicaragua, Cuba and the Dominican Republic. All are cultural excursions into the world of premium cigars, where manufacturers open their fields and factories to enthusiasts from around the world. See this issue for details on all three events.

PRO CIGAR FESTIVAL 2016

BIG SMOKE IN THE BIG APPLE

IF BIG SMOKE VEGAS WAS TOO FAR AWAY, THERE'S STILL NEW YORK.
This Thursday, Pier 92—an events space on the west side of Manhattan—will welcome cigar smokers from New York City and the metropolitan area to light up en masse for the city's largest smoking party of the year. For one night, cigar lovers will be able to partake in the gentlemanly pastime of premium smoking while interacting with some of the biggest cigar manufacturers in the business. The festivities begin at 6 p.m., and by the time they end at 9:30 p.m., each attendee will walk out with more than 30 premium cigars. For more details on this week's Big Smoke New York, see cigaraficionado.com.

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FREYJA CIGARS

Featured Cigar: Diamond Crown Maximus Toro No. 4 (90 Points)
J.C. Newman's Maximus line, which features a dark wrapper from Ecuador, is a fuller-bodied offshoot of the core Diamond Crown brand. In December's Cigar Aficionado, the Toro No. 4 (6 inches, 50 ring gauge, \$13.75) impressed our panel with its easy draw, creamy smoke and combination of earth, leather, graham cracker and raisin sweetness.

Diamond Crown Ratings Peruse Our Tasting Database

Charity Cigars For The U.S. Military

Today, the age-old traditions of smoking a perfect cigar are meeting with a less traditional partner: social media. And with an estimated 14 million service members in the United States Air Force, Army, Coast Guard, Marine Corps and Navy, two organizations are sending thousands of cigars annually to boost morale and show support. Operation Deployed and Cigars for Warriors each take a different approach, but aim for the same end: providing cigars for American military who are a long way from home.

Full Story Here

THIS ISSUE SPONSORED BY Freyja: Freyja is Emma Viktorsson's first own blend under Las Cumbres Tabacos, made in the DR. The name represents the bridge between her Swedish roots and the "Cigar-Countries." Blend: DR Criollo '98 wrapper, Mexican San Andres Sinder, filler: DR Criollo '98, Photo Cubano and Nicaragua Estelí. Four sizes: MSRP from \$7-10. Visit us at jasonnewmanbooks.com

Cigar Aficionado's Big Smoke New York

Nearly 1,200 cigar enthusiasts descended upon Manhattan's west side last Thursday, all uniting in good company for Cigar Aficionado's Big Smoke—New York's largest celebration of cigars and the good life. Check out all the action in our photo gallery.

Big Smoke New York Slide Show Big Smoke Las Vegas Slide Show

A Snapshot Of Havana Cigar Shop Inventories

Senior contributing editor Gordon Moff recently traveled to Havana, Cuba for the annual Friends of Partagás festival. While there, he visited four of the city's more notable Le Casa del Habano cigar shops—Hotel Habana Libre, Meliá Habana, Hotel Nacional, 5th Avenida y 18—and recorded what he found in their humidor. Many shopkeepers reported low stocks of one particularly popular brand: Cohiba Behike.

Click For More Details

Review: Lotus Jaws Cutter With Serrated Blades

When The Lotus Group debuted its new Jaws cutter with serrated blades at this year's International Premium Cigar & Pipe Retailers trade show, it seemed like yet another cigar accessories gimmick. But after much testing, we discovered the saw-toothed edges of the Jaws are no scheme, but consistently cut with precision and a noticeable smoothness.

More Details Cigar Accessories Review Index

Cigar Pairing: Angel's Envy Cask Strength 2015

Senior features editor and spirits guru Jack Bettridge tastes the third annual edition of this cask-strength Bourbon from Louisville Distilling Co. The spirit is finished in Portwine casks, vatted in a single batch and comes in at a scorching 127.3 proof. He pairs it with a Joya de Nicaragua Cuatro Cinco Reserva Especial Torpedo.

Full Tasting Here Drinks Pairing Index

JOIN US:

WHAT'S COMING UP

December 14: Top 25 Best Cigars of 2015 Reveal Begins
December 22: Cigar Insider is Published
December 29: Your Next Issue of News Watch is Released

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The Six-Day Cohiba Party

The Habanos Festival was a backdrop to this year's biggest cigar birthday: Cohiba's 50th BY GORDON MOTT



Reza Balouds from Iran (center) raises his bid for a limited-edition Cohiba humidor during an auction at the gala dinner of the XVIII Habanos Festival.

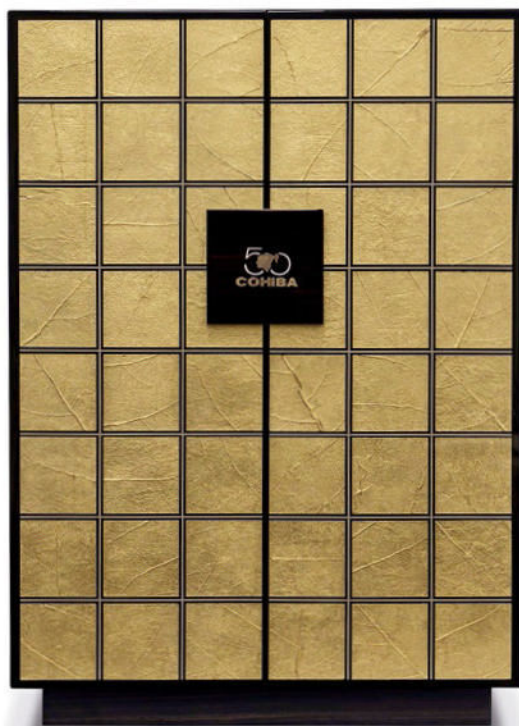
The black-and-gold curtained walls darkened the gigantic Pabexpo ballroom, the setting for the final night of the 18th Festival del Habano. The words of Cuba's most iconic brand, Cohiba, emblazoned the walls in gold letters, and the 1,200 to 1,400 attendees, who waited nearly an hour after the appointed time to gain entry to the hall, weren't 10 feet inside the door when they were handed one of the outstanding new releases of the week, the Cohiba Medio Siglo. By that final night, you might be forgiven for thinking the week had been anything but a showcase for everything about Cohiba.

The Medio Siglo joins the Linea 1492, an addition to the Cohiba Classic line launched in 1992 that matched many sizes formerly produced for the Davidoff Chateau series of Cuban cigars. Also known as the Siglo Series, the Linea 1492 has been one of the most popular, and highest-scoring brands in the world for the last 24 years, and the Cohiba Siglo VI

is one of the top-selling sizes. The Medio Siglo adds luster to the lineup by providing a short (4 inches) length and a thick ring gauge of 52. It's the same length as a Siglo I, and the same ring gauge as a Siglo VI—halfway in between the two, and thus, the name Medio.

The Medio Siglo wasn't the only Cohiba release of the week. The Cohiba Majestuoso 1966 is a 5 7/8 inch by 58 ring powerhouse, one of the biggest cigars in the Cohiba lineup. It is a limited-edition cigar, which will be produced in 1,966 humidors, each containing 20 cigars. Two of the cigars were handed out to each of the attendees on Friday night. As is my practice, I don't smoke the Festival cigars the night they are released; frankly, they are often very fresh, and benefit from six months in my humidor.

But the Majestuoso isn't the biggest cigar in the Cohiba lineup, nor the most astonishing release of the week. That honor goes to the 50th Anniversary Cohiba, a new, 7 by 60 vitola known as a Grandioso



The Elie Bleu Cohiba 50th Anniversary humidor (left) is paneled with tobacco leaves gilded in 24-karat gold. It holds 50 special Cohiba cigars (right).

in the factory. It will be the first 60 ring gauge cigar produced commercially in Cuba. It will be sold in 50 numbered humidors, each one with two front doors containing 48 panels of 24-karat gold encrusted ligero tobacco leaves. The humidor holds 50 cigars, each individually numbered from 1 to 2,500. Humidor No. 1 was the highlight of the live auction held at the conclusion of the Festival gala dinner, bringing a winning bid of 320,000 euros (\$350,800). Along with six other special humidors, the auction raised a total of 865,000 euros (\$948,256). The proceeds will be given to the Cuban public healthcare system.

There actually was a real cigar festival that ran from February 29 until the gala dinner on March 4. The opening-night cocktail party was held at the renovated Tobacco and Wood Warehouse, a beautiful building on a pier that juts out into Havana's well-protected harbor. The cigar of the night was one of the special new smokes slated for 2016—the Hoyo de Monterrey Epicure No. 2 Reserva Cosecha 2012, the first Hoyo Reserva from Cuba.

Cuba also typically showcases an Edición Limitada at the Festival, and at the Wednesday night dinner honoring Cuba's cigar rollers they handed out Trinidad Topes EL 2016, a 4 7/8 by 56 cigar with a very dark wrapper. The other two Limitadas, which were not passed out during the week, are the Montecristo Dantes (6 5/8 inches by 48 ring) and the Romeo y Julieta Capuletos (6 by 53). The Montecristo will be presented in wooden 10-count boxes, the Romeo y Julieta in 25-count dress boxes and the Trinidad in 12-count semi-boite nature boxes.

The other big cigar release was the 2016 additions to the Añejados line, cigars that were rolled in 2007 or 2008, and have been aged in their boxes for the last eight years. This year, the two cigars are the Partagás Corona Gorda (which measures 5 5/8 by 46) and the Hoyo de Monterrey Hermoso No. 4 (5 by 48). Both cigars were part of a special tasting on Tuesday morning at the Festival. The other new release, essentially lost in the hoopla over Cohiba, was a Cuaba 20th Aniversario, a 6 3/4 by 56 limited-edition figurado, keeping with the brand's traditional shape, and destined for the market as a Casa del Habano exclusive.

Like any event billed as the biggest and best cigar festival in the world, there were some unusual and lighthearted things to do, something every cigar lover should think about experiencing sometime in their life. The *Cigar Aficionado* team attended the Longest Ash Contest (No, we didn't win.) But we got to smoke Ramon Allones Gigantes cigars and sip Havana Club 7-year-old rum. I also attended a rum and cigar pairing where a Cohiba Siglo VI was matched up with Cuba's top premium rum, a Havana Club Unión, followed by a Cohiba Maduro 5 Genios paired with the country's newest premium rum bottling, a Tributo 2016, which uses as its base rums aged in 80-year-old barrels. Both combinations were, in a word, perfect.

Finally, there are always fantastic stories swirling around the event, spreading like wildfire without any assistance. In the space of a few hours, I was told Michael Jordan, Arnold Schwarzenegger and Leonardo DiCaprio would be attending the final gala dinner. None of them appeared. Maybe next year.

We also tried to nail down a persistent rumor about another catastrophic harvest in Cuba's tobacco growing regions; like many things in Cuba, the truth seems to lie somewhere between the rosiest reports and the most dire accounts. Habanos S.A. admits the 2015/2016 season was difficult, but that "it was not going to affect the quality or the quantity of tobacco" available for the year's upcoming production. That was according to Luis Sánchez Harguindey de Pardo, the copresident of Habanos. And grower Hirochi Robaina said his crop had been excellent. Hector Luis Prieto, another grower, said he had lost a first planting that had been dedicated to filler tobacco, but a second planting to grow wrapper leaf under shade cloth had been excellent. What we do know is that heavy rains in the middle of the growing season in early January affected many smaller, less skilled farmers, but there's no way to calculate how much of their tobacco ends up in the country's premium brands.

In the end, we enjoyed a week of cigars, lots of rum, great dinners with friends and colleagues in the cigar business, and started planning for next year before even setting foot in the airport to leave. ❖



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Onstage during the final night of the ProCigar Festival, left and center, Jochy Blanco shaves off the mustache of Manuel "Manolo" Quesada. The mustache raised \$15,000 for the charity auction. Right, the beautiful ambassadors of ProCigar hand out a gift-box of smokes right before the first gala dinner in Santiago.

A Celebration of Dominican Cigars

BY GREGORY MOTTOLA

Perhaps no other organization in the world strives to demystify tobacco and the cigarmaking process as ardently as ProCigar, the united group of cigar producers in the Dominican Republic. Its annual festival is a week in the Dominican Republic where no doors are closed, cigars are plentiful and questions rarely go unanswered.

This year, the ninth ProCigar Festival started on the white sands of Punta Cana, ended in Santiago and raised more than \$200,000 for charity. It was a cigar-centric celebration that immersed more than 300 guests from all over the world in the tobacco culture of the Dominican Republic.

From February 21 to 26, cigar manufacturers opened up their fields and factories for a casual yet educational tobacco tour that showcased the Dominican Republic's premium cigar industry. Each day was dedicated to cigar activity, while each night ended in a festive cocktail party or grand dinner.

The events began in Punta Cana at the Westin Punta Cana Resort & Club and wrapped up with a tour of the Tabacalera de Garcia factory, makers of the Dominican Montecristo and Romeo y Julieta brands. A ride across the country brought the group to Santiago, where most Dominican cigars are made, for the second leg of the event.

Guests had multiple options each day. One could choose to visit large cigar factories like General Cigar Dominicana and Davidoff, or opt for tours of mid-size to smaller operations such as Tabacalera Palma, Quesada Cigars, La Aurora (the oldest cigar factory in the Dominican Republic) and La Flor Dominicana. Other tours included Tabacalera Alianza (maker of E.P. Carrillo cigars) and De Los Reyes (makers of Saga). Carlos Fuente Jr. even hosted a field trip out to Bonao for a tour of Arturo Fuente's Cigar Family Charitable Foundation School as well as the Chateau de La Fuente tobacco farm.

"We make 5.5 billion cigars annually," said Hendrik Kelner, vice chairman of Tabadom Holding Inc. and president of ProCigar. "About 220

million of those cigars are premium. That equates to \$610 million a year for the Dominican Republic and the employment of 20,000 workers."

According to Oettinger-Davidoff CEO Hans-Kristian Hoejsgaard, 2015 turned out to be a tougher year for the Dominican Republic than anticipated. Growth in the U.S. was only 2 percent and Europe decreased by 5 percent. Asia was down too, thanks to what Hoejsgaard referred to as China's "antiluxury and antispending campaign."

A dry season in the Dominican Republic resulted in 20 percent less tobacco from the farms. Those who had their own irrigation were not nearly as affected. Nirka Reyes, president of De Los Reyes Cigars, added that the lack of rain this year has made the tobacco stronger and more full bodied.

The final dinner took place at the Centro Español, a banquet hall in Santiago, concluding with a live auction, cohosted by Manuel Quesada, president of Quesada Cigars, and Michael Herklots, vice president of retail and brand development of Nat Sherman. Highlights of the auction included a trunk humidor filled with limited-edition Davidoff smokes, most notably a set of 10 Oro Blanco cigars. It sold for \$58,000—the highest-earning lot of the evening. And while a replica horse-and-buggy humidor from De Los Reyes filled with 70 cigars brought in \$50,000, the most unusual auction item had nothing to do with cigars at all. In a bit of bizarre theater, Litto Gomez of La Flor Dominicana challenged Manuel Quesada to shave his mustache in front of the crowd. The bidding began at \$4,700 (\$100 for each year the mustache had been on Quesada's face), and through a group effort of contributions raised a total of \$15,000.

The auction, which consisted of 14 lots donated by most of the ProCigar members, raised over \$200,000, a record for organization. Proceeds went towards a hospice for the aging, or the Voluntariado Jesus con los Niños children's hospital. ❖

moments to remember

Please send all submissions to: CIGAR AFICIONADO/Moments to Remember, Worldwide Plaza, 825 Eighth Avenue, 33rd Floor, New York, NY 10019. Or email them to: momentstoremember@mshanken.com. To order additional copies of CIGAR AFICIONADO, call 1-800-344-0763.



Television personality Steve Harvey visits Old Havana Cigars in the Grand Cayman Islands and enjoys a Cuban cigar with shopkeeper Karla Ebanks.



Enjoy those celebratory cigars! On his wedding day in Montreal, Canada, Dan Fumaria did not miss the opportunity to light up a couple of fine premium cigars with his longtime buddies of 35 years. From left to right: Charles Laberge, Jean-François Amyot, Jos Morandi, Marc Lacroix and Dan Fumaria.



Newlyweds Steve and Larissa Loonan find the best way to mark their wedding day is by savoring cigars on a beautiful summer evening in New Jersey.



On vacation in Aruba, Donald Heroux, Douglas Heath and Michael Latour of Rhode Island visit the Aruhiba cigar shop for some hand-rolled smokes.



Randy Johnson travels to Louisville, Kentucky, to tell his inspirational story for Ted's Cigars' Farris Project and shares a smoke with brand owner Ted Jackson.



First Sergeant Bill Holodnak celebrates a promotion with colleague Lieutenant Colonel Mike "Chewy" Vacca at the Havana House in Alhambra, California.



Newlyweds Mike and Alicja Schimka toast to their wedding day by indulging in a pair of Rocky Patel Java Mint by Drew Estate cigars in Las Vegas, Nevada.



Ricardo Bello celebrates his birthday in Valencia, Venezuela, by smoking a Hoyo de Monterrey alongside his daughter Zoe, who is enjoying a Padrón.



Tony Saia introduces his daughter Nicole to the good life by treating her to a savory Punch Cigar on her 18th birthday in Jamestown, North Carolina.



Lori Lengua Myer and Robert Myer savor their wedding cigars with Ian Baird, Luke Panza, Joe Lipple, Kevin Manley and Paul Glader in Brooklyn, New York.



Steve Beiser, Bill Stubbs and Steve Roppolo relax with Macanudos after marching in the Irish Channel St. Patrick's Day Parade in New Orleans, Louisiana.



Antoine Rawles and Thad Villarreal tailgate with fine cigars before a matchup between the Cowboys and Redskins at FedEx Field in Landover, Maryland.



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Bride Paige Sella shares Romeo y Julieta cigars with Kim Cuomo, Camille Taylor and Emily Durham on her wedding day at the Portofino Hotel and Marina in Redondo Beach, California.



Marvin Wells, Kyle Stamper, Tom Higdon, Josh Thigpen, Justin Thigpen and Bill Thigpen of Alabama relax with a few seaside smokes after fishing for red snapper in Port St. Joe, Florida.



Friends and family gather in Palos Verdes, California, to properly commence the marriage between Victoria and Dennis Ealy by indulging in celebratory libations and premium cigars.



Marcus Bronfeld gets the chance to meet Rocky Patel of Rocky Patel Premium Cigars Inc. at an event in Walnut Creek, California.



Air Canada pilot Andrew Marshall always keeps a copy of a certain magazine to read during the his long flights to Hong Kong.



Former Nascar driver Wally Dallenbach Jr. alongside Richard Childress, Lonnie Cooper, Greg Johns and Scott Griffin visiting a statue of writer Ernest Hemingway on a recent trip to Cuba.



Cigar-smoking brothers-in-law Rich Lofgren and Mike Tierney smoke H. Upmann and Aging Room cigars in front of the Louvre Museum while relaxing on vacation in Paris.

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At the wedding of Shawn and Lauren Sattler, the groom smokes a Macanudo 1968 in the company of his groomsmen while the bride and her bridesmaids enjoy CAO Eileen's Dream cigars.



In beautiful Texas Hill Country, James J. Fulgham and his sons Edgar John and Charles Clayton savor Gurkha Churchill cigars while playing golf at The Club at Concan in Concan, Texas.



Members of the Smokin' Oldies Cigar Society join together in smoking a few CAO Golds after the wedding of Stacey Dyer and Jeff Messier at Hawks Cay Resort on Duck Key, Florida.



Mildred Alavarado and Kathy Serrao enjoy premium cigars from the famed Hirochi Robaina at La Casa in Las Vegas, Nevada.



Allison White totes a Bolivar Belicoso Fino while posing alongside her father Craig White at her wedding in Perth Ontario, Canada.



Cheryl Desere'e, Joseph Hollins, Sharmaine Outlaw, Everett Jolley and Justin Harris enjoy jazz and fellowship at the Nashville Cigar Crew's third-anniversary event in Nolensville, Tennessee.



Members of the Irish marching club "Fir Máirseáil Nua Iberia" puff on premium cigars while enjoying beers and good camaraderie in front of Mulligan's Irish Pub in New Iberia, Louisiana.

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Greg and Summer Wozniak of Sanford, Florida, sample the local fare of hand-rolled cigars while on their honeymoon in Punta Cana, Dominican Republic.



Get the groom a cigar! Groomsman Matt Tanneberg shares an E.P. Carrillo cigar with Shawn O'Malley on the night of his wedding in Leawood, Kansas.



Stephen Adler and John Ing pause to admire one of Cuba's famous vintage automobiles while smoking Cohibas in the island resort town of Varadero.



On his eighteenth birthday, all Brady Gutenplan wanted was to smoke a cigar with his father Brian at their local Stogies Cigar Lounge in Montreal, Canada.



Chris Lehman shares a memorable smoke with his dog Ruger and step-dad George Oelrich on a beautiful Saturday afternoon in Plainfield, Illinois.



Former NFL player Mike Attardi savors cigars with Phil Dutcher, John Tice, Stuart Cochrane and Blake Owens at an NFL alumni event in Naples, Florida.



Brian Breiter, Paul Monicatti and Jeff Krivis pose with fine cigars beneath the soaring ceiling of the Partagás Factory on a trip to Havana.



Bride and groom Brianna O'Toole and Benjamin Parsons ring in their wedding day with a few great cigars on Plimoth Plantation in Plymouth, Massachusetts.



Patrons of cigar shops Up In Smoke in Dallas, Texas, and The Cigar Box in Tulsa, Oklahoma, tour Rocky Patel's tobacco fields while on vacation in Nicaragua.

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Two cigars are shown in wooden boxes. The top cigar has a red band and is labeled "PDR CIGARS". The bottom cigar has a blue band and is labeled "PDR CIGARS".

93
RATED
Cigar Aficionado



Stuntman and fire specialist Jayson Dumenigo lights a Bolivar Royal Corona with the snap of his fingers inside his magic room in Santa Clarita, California.



Soon-to-be-retired Captain Mahnerd surrounded by his crew and friends at Grey Grouse Pub in London, England, celebrating his final flight on the B-777.



There's no better way to finish a long day of branding cows than with a cigar, according to Angelique Martinez and Adrian Romero of El Valle, New Mexico.



Cigars and beer make a fine pairing for Sean Portis Poris, Randy Strother, Vahid Heidary and Steven Oh at the 90th Annual Virginia Gold Cup horse race.



Kimberly Kalesaran, Steve Jones and Harry Van Hulten set aside some time for a few cigars while visiting XCOR's Lynx spaceplane in Mojave, California.



John Papadogiannis, with a Cuban Quintero, and Mike Ghaleb, puffing on a Drew Estate, share an Easter Sunday smoke in Sherbrooke, Quebec, Canada.

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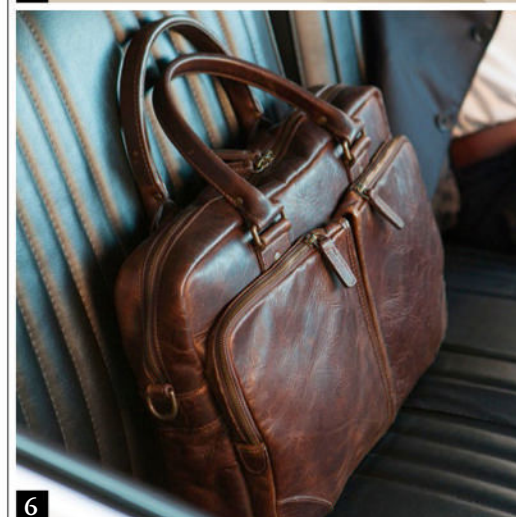
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I SMOOTH AS CEDAR—ADIRONDACK GUIDEBOATS

You needn't be a guide nor even live in the Adirondacks to appreciate the Cedar Guideboat. The combination fishing/hunting/hauling boat from Adirondack Guideboats is a modern take on a classic design, using cedar covered by a nearly invisible layer of glass fiber. Durable, but also lightweight, they are perfect for paddling and portaging. The boats are superbly handmade (300 man-hours) in Vermont and available in lengths from 12 to 19 feet (\$14,900 to \$18,000). There is also a Kevlar version with cedar appointments for \$4,400. adirondack-guide-boat.com

2 LOOKING RAZOR SHARP—ART OF SHAVING

We paused when we heard The Art of Shaving was introducing its first power razor. Had the world turned upside-down? The brand is known for a bit of old-school reverence for shaving with its instruments and related products. Not to worry. The Lexington Collection Power Razor is a traditional straight-blade affair, but outfitted with a mechanism that sends micro pulses to the razor for reduced friction and better glide. Of course it has all the luxury fittings we value from Art of Shaving. artofshaving.com

3 SPARKLING CHOICES—BONNE O

Even before the Three Stooges used it to comic effect, the idea of having seltzer on hand has been a fascination for bartenders. Now Bonne O makes it available to be made by the home mixologist with a couple of interesting twists. 1) It doesn't use CO₂ cartridges to make its bubbles, but a system that uses carbonator pellets that take up less space. 2) You can carbonate any nonviscous liquid, meaning endless possibilities like your own sparkling wine or a Gin Fizz that really fizzes. bonneo.com

4 COLD BREWING—HARIO WATER DRIPPER

Yearning for home-brewed iced coffee that won't taste watered down, sour or stale after it's cooled in the fridge? It's well known that simply cold brewing strips less of the acid from the grounds. Now, Japanese glassmaker Hario offers the Water Dripper (\$265 through Williams-Sonoma) that brings modern kitchen design to the party. The mechanism produces a coffee concentrate using an adjustable valve for desired flavor and strength. After brewing, simply add equal parts water at your desired temperature and enjoy. hario.co.uk

5 PERFECTO PEN—MONTBLANC

Sometimes a cigar is just a cigar and sometimes it's a stunning fountain pen from Creation Privée, Montblanc's bespoke division. This one-of-a-kind writing instrument that resembles a perfecto is wrapped in an actual tobacco leaf, features an 18k-gold nib, precious tourmaline stones and a diamond in the cap. Clients who participate in the program are able to customize their pen in their own vision and—via a webcam—can watch each step of the process as master jewelers, engravers, setters and nib finishers devote their passion to the final product. montblanc.com

6 IT IS YOUR BAG, MAN—MOORE & GILES BESPOKE

Tired of hearing the '60s expression “That's not my bag”? Moore & Giles, with its 83-year heritage in natural-leather craft, has instituted a bespoke program that makes it your bag...or dopp kit or weekend tote or briefcase or document portfolio or belts or whatever it is you want in leather. Available at select outlets, the program lets you choose from a selection of rare leathers not otherwise available in their traditional offerings. All pieces are made at their New York workshop. mooreandgiles.com/bespoke/

THE TOUR THAT BECAME LEGEND

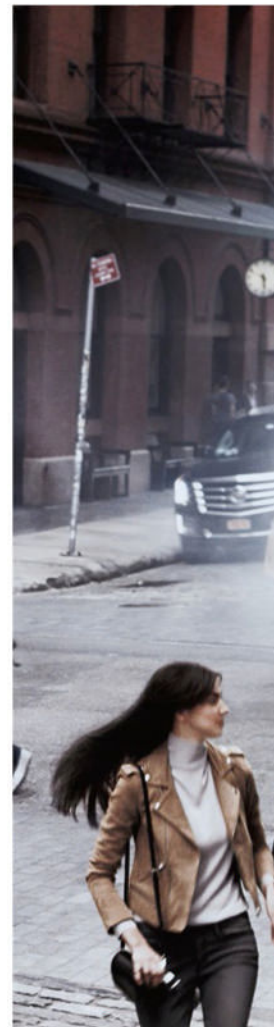
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